Toaru Majutsu no Index 7

The grimoire “Book Of the Law” that was written by the legendary magician contained the said magic of being able to summon angels, and it was carried away with the nun who knows how to interpret these texts.

At Academy City, Kamijou Touma, who passed his time by doing nothing, felt that this is most likely another unrelated occurence. But even in that “misfortune”, without knowing why, made up his mind to join that rescue mission...

And yet, the criminals who took away the above mentioned book are of the “Amakusa Catholic Church”, the religious denomination where Kanzaki Kaori was said to have worked at as a priestess...!

The “English Anglicans” Index belongs to, the “Roman Catholic Church” who’s the client this time, and the “Amakusa Catholics” which Kanzaki Kaori was formerly the leader of.

When the 3 magical organizations cross paths with Kamijou Touma, the story shall begin...!

鎌池和馬

イラスト／灰村キヨタカ

とある魔術の禁書目録（インデックス）7

電撃文庫

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とある魔術の禁書目録（インデックス）⑦

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Kamachi Kazuma

While in the middle of relaxing, we have reached book number 7. With regards to what seems like a list of books that is found under these comments too, it does indeed seem that it's trying to reduce the amount of blank space here. This is the slightly earnest Kamachi signing off.

(Products of Dengeki Bunko)

Toaru Majutsu no Index
Toaru Majutsu no Index 2
Toaru Majutsu no Index 3
Toaru Majutsu no Index 4
Toaru Majutsu no Index 5
Toaru Majutsu no Index 6
Toaru Majutsu no Index 7

Illustrator: Haimura Kiyotaka

Born in 1973. Here, for many months repeatedly, I’ve been drawing pictures of ‘work → sleep.’ Waking up and having no choice, I have to do one thing that has to be done at ease. But, speaking about being at ease... I wish for some free time.

カバー／暁印刷

とある魔術の
禁書目録
インデックス
7
鎌池和馬
イラスト／灰村キヨタカ

"Hey!! You weren't listening to a word I said!
You were just smiling and nodding!!"
High school student of Academy City — Kamijou Touma
?
"What? No, I would never do anything like that."
Roman Catholic Church nun — Orsola Aquinas

"Coward!"
Nun managing the Index of Prohibited Books — Index
"I have nothing to say
to that, nor any need to."
Anglican Church magician from Necessarius — Stiyl Magnus

“Mgh.....Papa...”
Roman Catholic Church nun — Agnese Sanctis

"Give it a rest, Kanzaki Kaori.
You can't beat me."
Kamijou Touma's neighbor — Tsuchimikado Motoharu
"Have you come to stop me?"
Anglican Church magician from Necessarius — Kanzaki Kaori

“But if you say so, who am I to refuse? It’s your funeral.”

Vicar of the Amakusa-style Christian Church — **Tatemiya Saiji**

“Mm-hmm. There are some other things going on. Some other things, you see.”

Archbishop of the Anglican Church — **Lola Stuart**

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Toaru Majutsu no Index

とある魔術の禁書目録

インデックス

7

Kamachi Kazuma
鎌池和馬

イラスト・灰村キヨタカ

Haimura Kiyotaka

デザイン・渡邊宏一

Translators
Yen Press - Full Volume

PROLOGUE

Begin Action.

The_Page_is_Opened.

St. George's Cathedral.

Despite the moniker of "cathedral", it was just one of many churches located in inner London. It was a fairly large building, but compared to internationally popular sightseeing spots like Westminster Abbey and St Paul's Cathedral, it was exceptionally small. And, of course, it didn't come close to the Canterbury Cathedral, said to be where Anglicanism began.

Besides, there were many buildings in London named after Saint George. Churches were one thing, but there were also department stores, restaurants, boutiques, and schools sharing the name. There were likely dozens of St. Georges just within the city borders. And there may have even been more than ten St. George's Cathedrals in the first place—after all, the name was so famous it was even tied into the national flag.

Since its construction, St. George's Cathedral was the headquarters of Necessarius.

It wasn't a good connotation. Those who were a part of Necessarius were members of the Church, and yet they used tainted magic. Their duty was to aggressively destroy magic cabals in England and annihilate the magicians belonging to them. They were considered boorish and uncouth by Anglicans, so they were moved out of Canterbury, the headquarters of the Anglican Church, and relegated to St. George's Cathedral in what amounted to a demotion.

However...

Though it was once nothing more than a window-side post, Necessarius was silently but fervently bearing fruit.

And these actions granted them trust and privileges within the grand organization known as the Anglican Church. They did so well that while the heart of the Anglican Church was still officially the Canterbury Cathedral, its mind had been entirely surrendered to St. George's Cathedral.

That was how this cathedral, just a stone's throw away from the center of London, had become the core of the largest religion in the country.

One morning, a red-haired priest named Stiyl Magnus was walking through London's streets, fretting to himself.

The city itself didn't look any different. Stone-built apartments constructed a little over three hundred years ago stood lining either side of the road as office workers hurried down it, their cell phones in their hands. At the same time traditional double-decker buses drove slowly by, the equally traditional red phone boxes were being steadily removed by construction workers. It was the same scenery as always—an amalgamation of the old and the new.

The weather hadn't changed, either. The skies over London this morning were clear enough for the sun to shine through, but the weather in this city was so hard to predict that nobody could really know what it would be like even four hours later, and many carried umbrellas with them. And it was hot and humid. London was known as the city of fog, but its volatile summertime weather was another problem entirely. Intermittent rain would bring nearby temperatures up, while the hot foehn wind and heat waves, growing more prevalent in recent years, led to extreme heat. Even snug little sightseeing spots had problems. Of course, Stiyl had chosen to live in this city in spite of its issues, so he didn't particularly mind.

The problem was the girl walking beside him.

"Archbishop!"

"Mm. I implore you, my good sir, do not call my name in such a grand manner. Today I have at last chosen a simple, plain outfit, you see," proclaimed a carefree voice in Japanese.

The voice belonged to a girl who looked about eighteen, clad in a simple beige habit. Incidentally, holy garb was supposed to be either white, red, black, green, or purple, and the embroidery could only be made with gold thread—so she may have been bending the rules a bit.

She was probably the only person who thought her outfit was blending in with the people in the city. Her skin was so fair it shone, and her eyes were a perfectly clear blue. Her hair, which looked like something that would be sold by a vendor of precious gems, utterly failed to fit in with the crowd.

Her hair was abnormally long, too. She wore it straight down—but at her ankles, it turned up and went back to her head. It was held there by a big silver barrette...and then it went all the way down to her waist again. Its length was roughly two and a half times her height.

London's morning rush hour—and Lambeth's in particular—was one of the most congested in the world, but nevertheless it seemed like the volume of nearby sounds was being lowered. Even the air around them felt akin to the silence called for in a cathedral.

She was the archbishop of the 0th parish of the Anglican Church's Necessarius.

Lola Stuart.

The Anglican Church's leader was the reigning king. And beside him was Lola...the highest archbishop, whose role it was to command the Church in place of the king, who was normally extremely busy.

The organization of the Anglican Church was like an antique stringed instrument.

While the tool had an owner, a caretaker carried out the tool's maintenance and repairs. It didn't matter how excellent the violin was—if not used, its strings would slacken before you knew it, its sound box would be damaged, and the sounds it played would grow hoarse. Lola was the temporary performing musician who prevented that.

But this relationship, just like the one between Westminster Abbey and St. George's Cathedral, was now—both practically and on paper—turned on its head, and the ability to give commands rested in her hands now.

Despite her vast authority, the archbishop was now prancing along a morning street without any bodyguards to speak of.

The two of them were currently headed toward St. George's Cathedral. Lola was also the one who had instructed him in advance to come to the cathedral at this time, so she should have been waiting there...

"I, too, do have a location to which I must return home each day. I could never remain within the confines of such an antiquated cathedral for my whole life." Lola proceeded down the road, her footsteps not making a sound. "Let us talk whilst we walk, shall we? Lest we use our time poorly."

Most of the people passing by were company workers. After all, they were close to Waterloo Station, the largest in London. A nun and a priest wouldn't have been an unusual sight here. It was no Rome, but London still had as many churches as it did parks.

"Well, I suppose I don't mind. But if this was something you needed to call me out to the cathedral for, then you don't want to be overheard telling it to me, do you?"

"Pray tell, does it bother you? How small a man you are. Can you not possibly find any enjoyment in our constitutional? Priests listen to the confessions of the women as though they are playboys, after all. Haven't you even a modicum of desire for adventure?"

"..." Stiyl made a slightly displeased face, then said, "May I ask you a question?"

"Please, stay your formal language. What would you have of me?"

"Why are you talking like a complete idiot?"[1]

"...?"

The archbishop of the Anglican Church reacted much like someone had just pointed out she'd buttoned up her shirt wrong—at first she was dumbfounded, then she froze in place, and finally her face went bright red.

"Huh? I— What? Do I sound odd to your ears? Verily, should I not be conversing in the Japanese language in the manner with which I am even now speaking?!"

"Umm, excuse me, but I can barely even understand what you're saying. Even your archaic Japanese seems messed up."

The people walking down the street in suits wouldn't have understood Japanese, but for some reason, the bustle around them had turned into whispering—and it felt like it was focused on Lola.

"A-argh...I did verily examine a great many things of literature, television, and all the rest...I even had a real-life Japanese person check my work, too..."

Stiyl sighed. "Who is this real-life Japanese person exactly?"

"A-a gentleman named Tsuchimikado Motoharu..."

"...He would dress his stepsister up in a maid outfit and then faint out of happiness. He's dangerous. Please don't consider him a standard Japanese person. Asia's culture isn't that strange."

"You have a point. I suppose then that I must mend my mistaken way of speaking lest I— Egads!"

Lola's shout caused a flock of pigeons resting on the road to all fly up into the air.

"What's the matter?"

"It has become part of me! I'm never going to fix it *now*!"

"...Please don't tell me you spoke so idiotically during your conference with the Academy City representative."

[1] In the original text, the author purposely uses something that sounds like old Japanese for Lola's dialogue.

Lola's shoulders gave a jolt. "N-no, it is nothing I must fret over. It's fine, everything is fine, entirely fine," she said, but her voice was trembling, there was an odd droplet of sweat dripping down her cheek, and her eyes were wandering.

Stiyl breathed a sigh that smelled of tobacco. "Anyway, we can talk about that once we arrive at the cathedral."

The two of them turned a corner, on which was situated a Japanese restaurant that Kanzaki Kaori frequented in secret, and continued.

"N-no! I have no need to feel such mortification. I declare that I have done nothing uncouth from the first."

"Give this nonsense a rest and get down to business, please. Oh, and if you're not confident in your Japanese, then can't you just switch to English?"

"N-nonsense...! Th-this has nothing to do with my not possessing confidence. Yes, that's right! It is simply that I am not well on this particular day," claimed Lola, acting extremely suspiciously. "As for work...Oh, but first—"

She took two pieces of paper that looked like sticky notes and a black Magic Marker out from the breast of her habit. Stiyl, who was familiar with using cards with runes on them, immediately understood what she would use them for.

"Squeak-squeak~"

While saying aloud the sound effect for the marker's scribbling, Lola began to draw some sort of pattern on the paper with the black marker. It was probably a talisman or circle. When the archbishop was in front of a large group of people for ceremonies and the like, she would act so solemn and majestic you would doubt she was even human—but right now she looked for all the world like a normal girl doodling in her notebook during class. Stiyl personally wished she would act that solemnly all the time.

Stiyl, a cigarette in his mouth, frowned a bit. He didn't like the sound the marker made very much.

"Squeak-squeak-squeaksqueak-squeak-squeak-squeaksqueak-squeak-squeak-squeaksqueak-squeak-squeak-squeaksqueak-squeak-squeak-squeaksqueak-squeak-squeak-squeaksqueak-squeak-squeak-squeaksqueak-squeaksqueak-squeak-squeak-squeaksqueak-squeak-squeak"

"...Excuse me for asking, but what is it you're doing?" asked Stiyl, gritting his teeth and shaking all over. Veins were popping out of his temples, but he'd just have to endure that right now.

"Think of this as a token of my consideration. Here!"

Finished drawing the same pattern on both pieces of paper, Lola pushed one of them into Stiyl's hands.

"*Ahem! I ask of you—are you able to hear this sound?*"

Stiyl heard what seemed like a voice speaking directly to his mind. He glanced at her face to make sure, but as he thought, her small mouth wasn't moving.

"A communication talisman?"

"*It is by doing this that we may speak our minds with nary the need to converse aloud.*"

(Hmm.)

Stiyl looked down at the card in his hand. She seemed to have gone out of her way to show consideration after his advice that others hearing them would be bad.

"*Why does your mental voice sound as moronic as your real one?*"

"*What did you say? W-wait, Stiyl! I assert that I am speaking English in this moment!*"

She fidgeted wildly yet silently, startling a cat curled up in front of a still-closed café. Stiyl sighed. Why couldn't she keep her cool now, despite all the gravitas she displayed as archbishop?

"*Then it must be mistranslating you during the communication and conversion processes. How exhausting. I can understand you just fine, though, so let's proceed.*"

"*W-we...Ahem! Then let us begin.*" Lola had been about to say something, but she swallowed it back down and changed the topic to something work-related. "*Stiyl, have you perchance heard the name* Book of the Law*?*"

"*The name of the grimoire? If I recall correctly, it was penned by Edward Alexander.*"

Edward Alexander—also known as Crowley. He was at once called the greatest magician of the twentieth century and the *worst* magician of the twentieth century. He was a legendary figure, one whose aberrant, extremist, abnormal words and actions got him deported from many countries on many occasions, one who fueled the creative passions of many an artist...and one who made an enemy out of every single magician in the world. Historical records stated that he died on December 1, 1947. He was such an utterly difficult and chaotic enemy that one could rightly say that his death loosened strings of tension across the planet.

Even after the great magician's death, there was no shortage of those calling themselves his students or legitimate heirs. Even today, there was an investigation agency dedicated to countering Crowley's own brand of artificial magicks. And, as is usually the case with people of such legendary status, Stiyl had also heard rumors that the man was still alive.

"What about it? The original copy is in the Roman Catholic Church's Vatican Library right now, isn't it?"

He had traveled across the world as bodyguard of the Index girl while they were cramming the 103,000 grimoires into her mind. It was an easy task to recall the owners and locations of a hundred or so of the most famous ones.

"Yes, well...Crowley was active in Sicily from 1920 to 1923, meaning the Book of the Law *was lost during that interval of time."* Lola continued, as if she were flipping through a history textbook. *"Now, Stiyl, mayhaps you know of the* Book of the Law's *unique characteristics?"*

"..."

Unique characteristics.

"If I'm correct, and disregarding the reliability of Crowley actually having written it, there are several academic theories on the matter. One goes that the Book of the Law *contains angelic techniques unusable by man that were revealed to him by Aiwass, the guardian angel he summoned. Another says that as soon as you open the book, it proclaims the end of the era of Christianity and the coming of an entirely new age...Sure, it's impossible that he heard all that from angels—they have no will of their own—but the second one is interesting. And—"*

Among the Anglican Church's speculations were many explanations that said the grimoire described methods by which to use the vastly powerful magic it boasted.

But everyone who heard all this came to one crucial question.

Why did it stop at mere speculation?

Index should have had knowledge regarding the *Book of the Law*.

"—nobody can decipher it, right? Grimoires are by nature written in various codes, but I hear this one is another story entirely. The Index gave up on deciphering it as well, and even Sherry Cromwell, the leading expert in code-breaking, gave it up as hopeless."

Yes—nobody could read the *Book of the Law*. By the Index's explanation, it was no longer able to be decoded using present-day linguistic approaches. Because of that, the passages of the *Book of the Law* were stuck in her head still in encoded form.

Lola smiled, pleased. *"If I were to say that someone who is able to read the* Book of the Law *has appeared, what would you do?"*

"...What?"

Stiyl looked at her again. She didn't look like she was joking.

"She is a nun of the Roman Catholic Church, and her name is Orsola Aquinas. It would seem as though she only knows the method to decipher it—she has not laid eyes upon the book itself."

"How, then?"

"This Orsola was apparently hunting for the method of decoding it using but a portion of its manuscript to serve as a reference. She had only the table of contents and a few pages from the initial section at her disposal."

The original copy of the *Book of the Law* was under such strict watch that even she wouldn't easily have been able to view it. And since she wasn't Index, even gaining access to the original copy without proper care would be dangerous.

"The Roman Catholic Church...is lacking cards to play in our overarching power struggle at the moment. Are they attempting to use the Book of the Law *in a plot to recover from that setback? Do they not see it as anything more than the blueprints for a new weapon...?"*

The Roman Catholic Church was said to be the largest of the religious factions of Christianity, but there were reports that their strength had waned. Their greatest power, the Gregorian Chant, made up of more than three thousand people, had been destroyed by a certain alchemist. Since that was the case, Stiyl didn't doubt that they'd jump at the opportunity to replenish their lost strength by using the knowledge in the *Book of the Law* to plan and create a new spell to replace the Gregorian Chant and protect their seat at the top.

"Well, 'twould seem impossible for them to use the Book of the Law *to bolster their military forces. At least, there is presently no threat of the Roman Catholic Church using it immediately to assail a place, so you can rest easy."*

"?"

"Mm-hmm. There are some other things going on. Some other things, you see."

Lola sounded awfully certain, but Stiyl frowned. What was her basis for saying that? He considered briefly that there was a pact between the Anglican Church and the Roman Catholic Church forbidding the book's use, but...

(...Then why would the Roman Catholic Church need Orsola to decode the *Book of the Law* in the first place?)

"You're such a worrywart. It is written upon your face. I keep telling you, all is well! All is well."

"But..."

"Ahh, how vexing, how vexing indeed! Whatever in the world the Roman Catholic Church is plotting on using the Book of the Law *for, they cannot, at any rate, carry it out right this second."*

Before Stiyl could ask her why, she answered him.

"The Book of the Law *and Orsola Aquinas—these both do appear to have been stolen."*

"What...By whom?!"

Stiyl couldn't help but say that aloud. His outburst caused the eyes of the company workers heading to the station to all gather on him.

"I have a good guess, so your job is to hear the details from me and then deal with it. Though I am sure of one thing—our opponent will be Japan's Amakusa-style Christian Church."

"Amakusa..."

Stiyl's current partner was Kanzaki Kaori. Amakusa was a Japanese branch of Christianity, which she used to be the leader of—their priestess.

But Stiyl didn't see them as a Christian religion. There was too much Shinto and Buddhism mixed into it. It hadn't retained the original form of Christianity.

"As a church, the Amakusa is significantly smaller than the national religions of Rome, England, and Russia. That they continue to thrive in the world is because of the presence of an irregular: Kanzaki. Their central pillar has been lost, so it is not odd that they should seek out the Book of the Law *and replace her with it. After all, using the book could seriously upset the power balance of Christianity."*

If Orsola Aquinas and the *Book of the Law* had fallen into the Amakusa Church's hands, they could use it at any time. In fact, it would be stranger if they *didn't* use it.

"*But still!*" Stiyl's voice became ragged. "*Wasn't the* Book of the Law *safe in the deepest part of the Vatican Library? Right now, the Amakusa Church is small enough to desire power. A religion of that size would never be able to break in there. I know because I've actually been inside the Vatican Library as the Index's bodyguard. There are no gaps in their security or any back doors. It's a wall, plain and simple!"*

"*I'm saying the* Book of the Law *wasn't in the Vatican Library."*

"*What?*" Stiyl's expression froze.

He passed by what appeared to be a horse-drawn wagon meant for sightseeing, the horse's hooves making clopping noises as they pranced along the road. There was a license plate politely affixed to the rear of the wagon.

"*The Roman Catholic Church had moved the* Book of the Law *into a museum in Japan to hold an international exhibition. I expect I do not need to tell you why the Holy Stairs in the Archbasilica of St. John Lateran in Rome, which the Son of God is said to have ascended as he bled, are open to the general public, yes?*"

The Church opened its historical and religious articles to the public once every few years.

The reason was simple—it was to attract guests so they could collect donations from many disciples as well as recruit new ones. Because the Roman Catholic Church had lost its most powerful weapon, the three-thousand-strong Gregorian Chant, they wanted to put as much as possible into creating new spells and strengthening their numbers.

The most effective way to gain new disciples would be to plan these events in places there were none already. Japan was suitable for that purpose, but going there would simultaneously weaken its controlling power. The Amakusa Church must have pinpointed that weakness.

"*That's absurd...They put something that dangerous on display, then let it be swiped out from under them? How much must the Roman Catholic Church embarrass itself before it learns?*"

She chuckled. "*They are the most cognizant of that fact, I believe. They may have gained a terrain advantage, but their pride is in shambles now that a small religion in the Far East has bested them.*"

"*Right. So they shamefully and scandalously came crawling to us to see if we'd cooperate, is that it?*"

"*Nay. 'Twould seem they wish to settle things by their own hand. Because of that, we went to some effort in acquiring this information. It may be their last bit of pride speaking, but in all honesty, at this those fools need to wake up and face reality.*"

"*We weren't helping rescue Aquinas and retrieve the* Book of the Law *at the Roman Catholic Church's request?*"

"*They were hesitating. And if Orsola Aquinas truly is able to decode the* Book of the Law*, we would need to move in anyway.*"

"*...Then you plan on placing them in our debt? Do you think those religious nobles would pay us back for anything?*" asked Stiyl, as if the whole matter were idiotic.

Stiyl was aware the Roman Catholic Church—the majority of disciples ignorant of magic aside—had a famously high level of pride and self-regard. Perhaps it was a remnant of once having controlled Europe. That went especially for those thickheaded priests and bishops who belonged to stricter groups. Not only would they look down on those who got in their way, but there were even some who would outright tell people cooperating with them that their very cooperation made them pathetic and detestable.

"Not a hair on my head wishes to support the fools who are causing the old way, Catholicism, to rot—in fact, they are the ones to blame for it being called that. But hear me, Stiyl—we have a larger problem."

"And what's that?"

"We cannot contact Kanzaki Kaori."

Lola used only the minimum number of words, and Stiyl immediately knew what she meant.

Kanzaki used to be the leader of the Amakusa-style Christian Church. Though she was separate from them now, she still thought of herself as part of them. If she found out that her people were causing problems and making an enemy of the Roman Catholic Church, the world's largest religion with more than two billion believers, what actions might she take?

She was one of less than twenty known Saints in the world, and her very existence would balance a scale similar to nuclear weaponry. The Anglican Church had let go of her reins, and if she were to kill someone from the Roman Catholic Church on top of that, what would happen...?

"With her personality, it is indeed quite possible that she would lend a hand without ceasing to think of the consequences. Were she of average or below average strength, that would be one thing. However, as this is Kanzaki we're speaking of..." Lola heaved a sigh, unamused. *"I would like to settle things afore Kanzaki has time to make a mistake. That is our top priority. I care not what method you select. You may retrieve the* Book of the Law *and Orsola, force the Amakusa to surrender by negotiation, or eliminate them along with Kanzaki by force."*

"You're telling me to fight Kanzaki?"

"Verily, I am, depending on the situation," replied Lola simply. *"Our own personnel are scattered, and they prepare even now to make for the Roman Catholic search party in Japan. But you will be with a separate unit, so I would like you to make contact with Academy City in advance of that."*

Stiyl blew white cigarette smoke from his mouth as if to voice his doubts.

Not regarding the part about him being in a separate team.

The magician Stiyl Magnus was never meant for team play. His personality was one reason, of course, but since he specialized in the usage of flame magic, going all-out meant nearby allies would run the risk of getting caught in the fire and smoke.

His Innocentius was partly unstable because its strength wildly fluctuated depending on how many cards Stiyl deployed, but it still boasted power enough to be true to its name.

The sight of a 3,000-degree Celsius ball of flames dancing freely and easily burning through even iron walls to approach and attack an enemy must have been the very vision of a god of death to his opponents. After all, excluding a certain boy's right hand, there was no possible way to halt its advance. His exploits could be summed up as "magnificent," given how many magic societies he had burned to the ground by himself.

So that wasn't the issue here.

"*This is our problem. Why do we need them for anything?*"

"*Index.*"

Lola spoke the name of a person...no, the name of a *tool.*

"*When grimoires appear, especially one as major as the* Book of the Law*, we require an expert's assistance, do we not? I have already explained everything to them, so you may feel free to put your strength on full display. One condition, though—that you work with the management.*"

"..."

"*What say you? You do not seem very joyful at your first with that in a while.*"

"*Not at all.*" Stiyl bit back a few choice words and erased his expression. "*...By 'management', you mean the Imagine Breaker, right?*"

"*Just so. You may use him as you will. Oh, but pray do not kill him. We're only borrowing him, after all.*"

"*Should we be getting a citizen of Academy City involved in a conflict among magicians?*"

"*As long as you make use of some tricks, everything will be fine. In either case, they will not let her go based on the conditions of our exchange. We don't have the luxury of drawing out the negotiations.*"

"*I...see.*"

He couldn't quite grasp what either the leader of Academy City or Lola, walking next to him, was thinking. There were probably some dealings going on behind the scenes, though, so it wasn't Stiyl's place as an underling to say anything, but...

"*Also, Stiyl. Take this with you, if you would.*"

Lola took a necklace with a small cross on it out of the sleeve of her plain habit and casually tossed it to Stiyl. He caught the symbol of faith with one hand.

"Is this a kind of Soul Arm? Though at first glance, it doesn't seem to have anything like that inside."

"Think of it as a small gift for Orsola Aquinas. When you meet her, give it to her when you can."

He didn't really know what she meant by it, but she didn't seem to have any particular desire to explain in detail. She was basically saying, "It doesn't matter, so be quiet and do your job."

The two of them stopped walking.

In front of them stood a church—not so big you would think it was a cathedral, and about a ten-minute walk from one of the largest stations in London.

St. George's Cathedral.

It was a sanctuary of darkness, a condensed version of the dark ages of witch-hunting and the Inquisition, where France's legendary saint, Joan of Arc, was burned at the stake.

Lola took a step in front of Stiyl and touched the heavy doorknob softly.

"Now then..."

She opened the heavy double doors and turned around, gesturing to the priest.

She spoke in a clear voice now, without using the cards.

"Why don't we discuss the details within?"

CHAPTER 1

Academy City.

Science_Worship.

Part 1

"The second semester is always busy, you know! There's the Daihaseisai, the Ichihanaransai, the field trip where we study far away for a few days, the Art Appreciation Festival, the Social Studies Festival, the Great Cleaning Festival, Finals Festival, the Follow-Up Festival, the Remedial Class Festival, the Crying Detention Festival...It's basically all festivals. Everyone's gonna be busy preparing for them all."

It was September 8.

That afternoon, in the hallway of a student dormitory, Tsuchimikado Maika spoke in a carefree voice. She was around the same age as Index, if not a bit younger, and she was wearing a strange maid uniform. Even more mysteriously, she was sitting seiza-style atop an oil drum−shaped cleaning robot. The robot's programming was trying to move it forward, but Maika had stuck her mop on the floor in front of it to stop it, so it was just shaking and rattling around.

"But I'm bored! I have nothing to do! Touma won't pay attention to me! He won't play with me!"

Index stood in front of Tsuchimikado Maika and argued. She was sneering and moving from left to right. Her locks of silver hair and her long white hood fluttered. The calico cat she held in her slender arms appeared to be interested in the sparkling of the gold embroidery decorating her hood—it was waving its forepaws around and swatting at it.

She knew how busy Kamijou Touma had gotten lately. But he was the only one in Academy City Index could talk to.

Of course, it wasn't like he was locking her up in the dorm or anything. He had given her a duplicate key, so she did actually take walks here and there while he was away at school. (Of course, it usually ended up in her running back home after coming up against machines she couldn't handle—like the ticket vending machines at the station or locks that required fingerprint, venous, or bioelectric field authentication.)

This city was just strange.

Built when the western areas of Tokyo were developed all at once, eighty percent of this scientific city's population was composed of students. While Kamijou was at school, Himegami and Komoe were at school, too. So when Index had tried to go out and find someone new to talk to, she found the city eerily empty. For the past week, she'd been looking around the city in her own way. She did discover that the lady at the clothes store would talk to her cheerfully—except when she was replacing clothing on the racks—but Index didn't quite think that's what she was looking for.

Tsuchimikado Maika, though, was an exception among exceptions.

In this city, people came and went at very specific times of day, but this girl alone wasn't bound to any of time's rules. Index had seen her around the city both in the morning and in the afternoon, at the convenience store, the department store, the park, the bread store, the station building, the student dorm, on the roads, and near school—it didn't seem to matter when or where.

Maika insistently pounded the palm of her hand on the cleaning robot, dissuading it from moving forward, and continued.

"Kamijou Touma has his own issues to take care of, so you shouldn't get in his way. He's not locked up at school because he likes it, you know. There are a lot of difficult things about school!"

"Mgh. I know that, but...How come you're not locked up at school, then, Maika?"

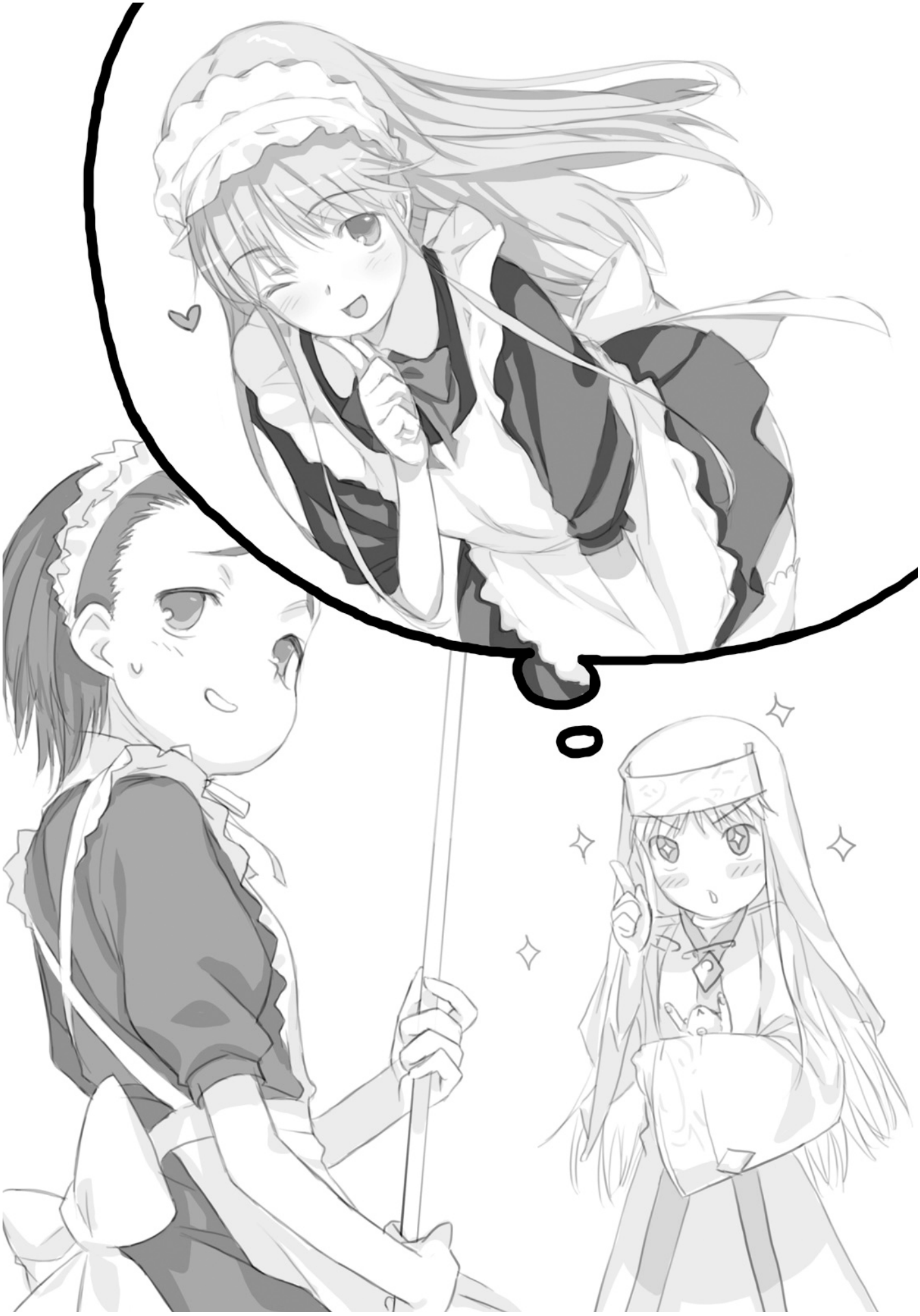
"Hee-hee! I'm an exception. Basic maid training is all fieldwork!"

The home economics academy Tsuchimikado Maika attended wasn't just a strange, anachronistic school that pumped out maids. They produced specialists—people able to assist their masters in any location, from scraping gum off the sidewalk to aiding international summits. Thus, Maika carried out her "fieldwork" in a variety of locations. Of course, not all the students were out on fieldwork. This was a special step only for those elites who passed a standardized test and were judged to have the ability never to look disgraceful despite still being in training.

Index didn't know about all the sweat and tears that went into it. She cutely tilted her head to the side.

"So if I became a maid, I could go anywhere I wanted whenever I wanted? I wouldn't be locked up at school? Could I even do fieldwork in Touma's classroom?"

"Well, no, that's not what maids really—"



“Then I’m gonna become a maid, too! And then maybe I can go to Touma’s class to play!”

“That sounds great, but becoming a maid is no easy task, you know. You have no household skills whatsoever. You’d have it tough needing to make lunch for boys day in and day out.”

“Then I’ll make Touma a maid! Maybe then I can get him to come play!”

“That sounds so great I’m practically crying over here, so maybe the nice thing to do would be to not tell Kamijou Touma you said that!”

The bored Index puffed out her cheeks, annoyed, and then quickly jolted to the left.

“She’s right. Sorry, but there’s no time for you to be a maid—nor to make him one, for that matter.”

Suddenly, a voice came from behind the girl in white.

(Huh?)

Index’s mind went blank for a moment. Maika, in front of her, was probably looking at the person standing behind Index. The maid’s face looked more scared than surprised.

(Who is...?)

Before the sister in white could turn around and speak up...

A large hand pressed down over her mouth, sealing it like masking tape.

Part 2

Kamijou Touma, an average high school student of the sort that seemed ubiquitous, trudged down the road in the evening sun.

An oil drum–shaped cleaning robot passed by him, and the propellers of the wind turbines that stood in for telephone poles spun around and around as if trying to swat away the city crows. There were plenty of advertisement blimps floating along in the orange sky, but the curtains hanging beneath them weren’t simple cloth signs, but rather the latest in super-thin screen technology. One display said, WELL-PREPARED MEANS NO WORRIES! DO YOUR BEST TO PREPARE FOR THE DAIHASEISAI! — JUDGMENT, the text a marquee running from bottom to top like an electric signboard.

The Daihaseisai was basically a big athletic meet. Academy City had millions of students, and it naturally turned into a big affair with every school in the city participating. Plus, all of the students were espers who had grown into some sort of special power or another. On top of *that*, because the Academy City board of directors had originally proposed the festival so it could gather data on large amounts of espers interacting with one another, full usage of one's powers was recommended for that day only. That meant you could see clashes between espers that you wouldn't normally be able to see. For example, during a soccer or dodgeball game, the ball could become invisible, or light on fire, or be frozen in ice. Anything went.

During that week, Academy City would be opened to both the general public and television crews. As far as he could tell, the ridiculously over-the-top situations that sprang up during matches drew in large numbers of viewers, since you absolutely couldn't see anything like it at normal sporting events. That was the reason Judgment always went full throttle preparing for it. Another part of it was the fact they wanted to raise Academy City's public image during those few days it was open. As a precaution, the city would also place Anti-Skill officers at crucial ability development locations under the pretext of special antiterrorism forces in order to prevent the general populace from getting into places the city didn't want it to see.

"B-blech..."

At least, that was what he'd heard from voices around him this week.

Kamijou had lost his memories after a certain incident, so he didn't know anything about the Daihaseisai. But based on what he'd heard, he could guess, though, it would be an extremely dangerous event for him in particular. The fundamental rule was that you could use your powers freely. In fact, not being assertive enough in using them would land you right in the loving arms of a medical squad. That was the Daihaseisai. In other words, depending on the time and place, there could be balls of fire, lightning attacks, and vacuum blades flying every which way during simple events like mock cavalry battles.

He looked at his right hand. In it was a power called Imagine Breaker. It would erase any strange ability, whether magical or supernatural, at just a touch. He still didn't want to be charging into a fierce, chaotic battle filled with dozens of espers with just *that*, though.

(...Why do I have to work my ass off to set up for an event that could end up as yet another bloodbath for me...?)

Even his preparations weren't going smoothly. As soon as he pitched an observation tent in the schoolyard, a female gym teacher had smiled in chagrin, clapped her hands together in apology, and said, "Sorry! We didn't actually need a tent!" And then when he put it away again, a tiny female teacher got mad and said, "Ahh! What are you doing, Kamijou-chan?! Didn't you get the message that we needed the tent after all?" Just saying *such misfortune* wasn't going to cut it.

He dragged himself toward his dormitory, his body completely exhausted from all the futile labor.

“Ah. Now that I think of it, the fridge is totally empty, isn’t it?”

He could see a supermarket right near him, but he would have to go back to the dorm to get money first.

(Man, I have to go back out again?)

His cheap sneakers had hard soles, so every time they touched the pavement, it exacerbated the pain in his feet.

Then, once he got close to the entrance of his dormitory, he suddenly heard a girl’s voice from overhead.

“Ahhh! K-K-Ka, K-K-K-Kamijou Touma! Hey, Kamijou Touma!”

(Hm?)

He looked up and saw Tsuchimikado Maika leaning over the metal railing on the seventh floor, waving her right arm. She was kneeling atop a cleaning robot as always, so her current position looked rather precarious. Her left hand held a mop, and she had it stuck on the floor. It seemed to be preventing the robot from moving forward like it was supposed to.

“S-s-s-something happened, something bad happened! Also your cell phone battery is dead!”

“Huh?”

At that, he took his GPS-equipped cell phone out of his pocket. Its battery had indeed run dry. He pushed a button and looked at the screen to find a ton of text messages from Tsuchimikado Maika.

Come to think of it, though she spoke in a long, drawn-out way, her face did look a little pale.

He was a little confused, but he hurried into the elevator.

When he arrived on the seventh floor where his room was, Maika released her mop, binding the cleaning robot, which proceeded to sluggishly wander over toward the elevator. The cat, which was normally always with Index, was sitting in the hallway for some reason, its ears down. It was unhappily holding Index’s free-with-contract cell phone in its mouth.

The cleaning robot arrived before Kamijou, and Maika put the mop back down in front of it to hold it in place again. “It’s an emergency, an emergency! The silver-haired sister got kidnapped!”

“Huh?” he grunted without thinking.

She continued, her face white. “A kidnapper! She’s been taken away! He told me if I reported him he’d kill the hostage, so I couldn’t do anything! I’m sorry, Kamijou Touma!”

The silver-haired sister—that must have been Index. The maid didn’t look like she was joking. And there were plenty of reasons people would want to kidnap Index.

She was a library of grimoires—there were 103,000 of them recorded in her memories. Magicians throughout the world desired that knowledge. Once, on August 31, she’d been kidnapped for that very reason.

“Wait a second. What happened? Could you explain in order?” he asked.

Maika began to explain little by little.

She had come to the student dorm for her “fieldwork” two hours earlier. While she was making her rounds, she ran into the bored Index on the seventh floor and started to make conversation. Then, someone came up behind Index and put a hand over her mouth, interrupting the conversation, and made off with her.

“Before the kidnapper left, he gave me an envelope. He wrote a bunch of stuff in it...”

She handed him an envelope—a wide one, like the ones used for junk advertisement mail. Her voice was more than a little unsteady. It wasn’t plain fear—it was probably also guilt at not having been able to do anything.

He glanced down at the envelope, then back up. “No, if you had been careless, things would have gotten much worse than they are now.”

He intended those words to comfort her, but she grew more worried instead. The tension in the air could burn through skin. She was just a normal student here who had no connection to any of this, so she couldn’t help it.

“Anyway, what did this asshole look like?”

She looked up slightly, thinking to herself. “Umm. Well, he was at least one hundred and eighty centimeters tall. And he looked Caucasian, too. But his Japanese was really good, and just by looking at him I couldn’t tell what country he came from.”

“Uh-huh, uh-huh.”

“And he had on these clothes that looked kinda like a priest’s.”

“Uh-huh?”

“But even though he was a priest, he smelled like perfume. And his hair was shoulder length and dyed really red, and he had a silver ring on all ten fingers, and he had this tattoo of a bar code underneath his right eye, and he was smoking a cigarette, and he had tons of earrings!”

“...Wait, I know exactly who that is. It’s that rotten English priest.”

She tilted her head to the side with a confused look. He checked out the envelope again. Inside was one piece of letter paper.

The characters were written in pen and looked as though they’d been drawn using a ruler. It said:

Kamijou Touma

If you value the girl’s life

Come to the abandoned Hakumeiza theater

Outside Academy City

At seven PM tonight

Come alone

“...Using a ruler to conceal your handwriting? That’s so old-fashioned.”

Was he seriously trying to conceal his identity just by hiding his handwriting using a ruler? How behind the times was he? There were methods of appraising handwriting that looked at the indentations of characters and measuring the slight finger tremble that varied from person to person. It used the same technology as the lasers for reading data off CDs. And anyway, there was no shortage of psychometers in Academy City.

(I think he’s serious about this. At this point? Is this his idea of a joke or something? thought Kamijou, a bit baffled. What is that idiot thinking? Did he get a late summer vacation and decided to come out here to fool around?)

As far as he could gather from what Maika had told him, Index’s kidnapper seemed to be her colleague, Stiyl Magnus. But he would never threaten her life. Quite the contrary—he wouldn’t hesitate to protect her even if it meant charging into enemy territory or into a fortress.

That reduced his nervousness by a good deal.

At this point, he felt bad letting Maika stay so seriously depressed about it.

“Ah, it’ll be fine, Maika. I think the culprit is someone Index and I know. So you don’t need to worry.”

“Huh? You two know him?! His motive—was it love gone wrong?”

“Uh, what? No, that’s not it...Though that does seem pretty possible.”

All that did was make Maika’s face go white. Kamijou sighed.

He shook the envelope, and out came a few more folded-up pieces of paper. He unfolded them to find an exit permit and related documents. All the necessary fields had already been filled in.

(Where did he even get this stuff? I mean, with these I should be able to just walk out the front door, but you’re supposed to go through a whole bunch of other steps to get these...)

He was appalled at the absurd juxtaposition of the threat letter and the carefully prepared documents to help him.

(What could that priest be thinking, anyway?)

Part 3

Hakumeiza, the abandoned theater whose name meant “twilight seats,” was only about one kilometer outside Academy City.

It had gone under less than three year earlier, so there were no visible signs of disrepair inside it. The interior furnishings had all been disposed of, so the place was completely empty. There was dust piled up here and there, since it hadn’t been cleaned, but it still didn’t give the impression of a ruin. It seemed like it would immediately spring back to life if given a thorough cleaning and restored with all its old furnishings.

It was as though the building was only hibernating for the winter. Maybe they hadn’t knocked the place down because they were still looking for its next owner.

Index and Stiyl were up on its empty stage. The large hall, about the size of a school gymnasium, came with a fixed stage and audience seats. All of the light fixtures had been removed as well, so the only illumination was the evening light shining through the five opened entrances.

The thin dusk settled upon the stage, on which Index was sitting on her knees, with her feet out at her sides.

She pouted and puffed out her cheeks. “Coward!”

“I have nothing to say to that, nor any need to.” Stiyl Magnus nearly flinched for a moment at her hostile stare, but he would never let it show. The flame that he touched to the end of the cigarette in his mouth slowly rose and fell in the dim light. The white smoke billowing from it combed past a sign on the wall that read NO SMOKING and disappeared.

“I believe you understand the general situation. I won’t ask you if you need me to go over it again. Given how powerful your memory is, there would be no point in repeating myself.”

“...An official edict from the Anglican Church.”

Index played back the explanation he’d been given after he’d brought her here.

Someone had appeared who knew how to decipher the *Book of the Law*, which should have been impossible to decipher.

The name of that person was Orsola Aquinas.

If the *Book of the Law* were deciphered, one might gain angelic techniques that would destroy the Christian power balance.

During a trip to Japan, someone had stolen both the *Book of the Law* and Orsola.

The culprits appeared to be the Amakusa-style Christian Church.

The Roman Catholic Church was beginning to take action to get the *Book of the Law* and Orsola back.

Nobody could contact Kanzaki Kaori of the Anglican Church, who used to be the leader of the Amakusa Church, and they predicted she would do something less than desirable.

On the surface, the Anglican Church was involved in this incident, since they were cooperating with the Roman Catholic Church, but their top priority was to deal with the problem before Kanzaki Kaori had time to make any needless moves.

“So you’re going to get a normal person like Touma wrapped up in this official ‘job’ of yours?”

“Actually, I’m somewhat unconvinced about why we need to, myself. But it’s an order from the powers that be, and all that.” The cigarette in his mouth wiggled as he spoke. “And it still puts us in a difficult position. He’s from Academy City. If we went directly to him and asked for his help, people might see it as the science side sticking their neck into the magic side’s problems. If this issue had occurred solely within Academy City, we could use our lame self-defense excuse again, but it’s different this time. We needed a way to give him a suitable motive for getting involved with this.”

And that had been the reason for the kidnapping.

In other words, Kamijou would leave Academy City not because of the *Book of the Law* or Orsola—he’d leave just so he could rescue Index. Then he would *just happen* to run into people from the Amakusa Church, and end up with no other choice but to fight them to save his friend. That would be the justification.

Index was from the magic side, of course, but Academy City and the Anglican Church currently had a handful of deals with each other that placed her temporarily in the city’s hands. She *had* been entrusted to the city, so it wouldn’t be strange for a resident of that city (Kamijou Touma) to go help her.

“I understand most of what’s happening, but I’m still not convinced.”

“Is that so?”

“Yeah. You don’t have to be so roundabout with him. If you just asked him to help you, he’d do it. Even if it led somewhere dangerous, he’d definitely come to help. I guess that’s why it’s hard to ask him to do it, though.”

“...Is that so?” Stiyl gave a slight grin. It was the smile of a father listening to his young daughter talk about a boy she liked.

“So what happens from here? The *Book of the Law* and Orsola Aquinas have fallen into the Amakusa’s hands. Are you saying we’re going all the way to their headquarters?”

There was now a note of seriousness in her voice—likely because with Kamijou Touma now involved, she wanted to collect every tidbit of information she could in order to decrease the danger.

“No, the situation has changed slightly.” Stiyl bitterly exhaled smoke. “Eleven minutes ago, the Roman Catholic Church clashed with the fleeing Amakusa. It’s going to be a war to rescue Orsola.”

Index narrowed her eyes in thought.

He was probably using the cigarette smoke to communicate. Index had seen mana clinging to the thin strands of smoke on a few occasions already, and each time, the white smoke fluttered unnaturally despite the lack of wind. Signal flares were a means of

long-distance communication that were used all over the world during every time period. She knew of more than a few spells that used the concept originating in many different ages and countries.

“If they had succeeded, then I wouldn’t have needed to be here, would I?”

“That’s right. But they haven’t clearly failed, either. There were no deaths on either side, but apparently it was a chaotic battle. I’m not sure about the *Book of the Law*, but it seems that Orsola slipped away during the confusion.”

“She didn’t go back to the Roman Catholic Church?”

“That’s what it would mean. And as she is currently missing, she may have even fallen back into Amakusa hands.”

“...That wouldn’t be good.”

Kidnappers used force to silence resistant hostages. If she had been grabbed a second time after already having fled, then who knows what they would do to her to exhaust her rebellious attitude?

That meant they didn’t have time to be waiting here. The scramble between the Roman Catholic Church and the Amakusa Church for the runaway Orsola would be spreading as they spoke.

“I’d like Kamijou Touma to hurry up, too, but I can’t change the command I left for him at this point. I had wanted to meet up with him before the Roman Catholic Church’s contact arrived, but...”

As Stiyl spoke, a figure appeared in one of the opened entrances to the great hall.

“...Unfortunately, it looks like we, too, don’t have to wait for him before starting.”

The figure was their contact from the Roman Catholic Church.

Part 4

“I feel like I’ve been leaving the city a lot lately...It’d be nice if I could just relax and do some sightseeing,” muttered Kamijou as he walked down a road along the outer wall of Academy City. The outer wall was more than five meters high and three meters thick.

(Still, I guess security’s lax because we’re in the middle of setting up for the Daihaseisai.)

He shot a glance over his shoulder at the entrance, now far behind him. The preparations were as large as the festival itself, with 2.3 million people participating, in addition to a lot of tradespeople from outside the city. Normally Academy City's security was tight, but with the current situation, they had no choice but to loosen it. He had exit papers, but he felt like they hadn't checked them as carefully as they usually did.

And so, with a little of this and a little of that, he left the cat with Tsuchimikado Maika and walked out of the city.

He checked his watch—it was past six. There was still almost an hour before the appointed time.

The Hakumeiza theater in question gave him a lot of trouble finding it. The names of abandoned buildings weren't included on his cell phone's GPS map. It made Kamijou think they were too quick to update. He had considered picking up a "slow-to-update," faded Tokyo sightseeing guidebook on a convenience store shelf, but when he checked his pocket, his wallet wasn't there. When he realized he must have forgotten it in his room because he'd left the city right after talking to Maika, he opened his eyes wide enough to cause the clerk to draw back a bit and decided to read it in the store.

(Umm...So I take that street, then cross the big road over there...Ugh! I-I feel like I'm about to forget where it is. Man, Index has got some brain up there...)

Lost in thought, he saw a bus stop nearby. The Hakumeiza building site he was going to meet them at was about one kilometer away. He would have liked to take a nice, air-conditioned bus, considering he was exhausted after school, but unfortunately, he had no money.

(Damn it...! Ah, doesn't matter if it's a bus or not—I just want to get somewhere air-conditioned.)

The bus stop was small, with only two benches and an overhang to keep out rain. It looked like it was deteriorating, though—the plastic roof had all kinds of cracks in it.

Then, he noticed someone at the bus stop.

She looked like a foreigner—a woman about the same height as him. She was staring at the timetable signboard from super close, like she was about to devour the whole thing. From the way she was completely frozen like that, he considered she might not know how to read it.

And her clothing—what was she thinking in this heat?—was a jet-black habit, including, of course, long sleeves and a long skirt. Upon closer inspection, he saw lines of silver fasteners both around her shoulders and twenty centimeters above her knees, so she must have been able to take off both her sleeves and long skirt—but like an idiot, she was in full sister garb. She had a thin white glove on each hand, and he couldn't see her hair. Her hood was different from the kind Index wore; it was a wimple that completely

hid her hair and everything on her head but her face. By how easily the single piece of cloth concealed her hair, she probably had it cut short.

He gave her a sidelong glance.

(Hmm, it's a sister...It couldn't be some maniacal nun who Index knows, could it?)

This was a bias that nuns throughout the world probably vehemently objected to, but Kamijou had run into all sorts of crazy people during his summer break, like Stiyl and Tsuchimikado. For him, a girl wearing a weird habit was someone to be careful around.

But...

"Excuse me..."

...The sister addressed him instead, beginning to speak in extremely polite Japanese.

"I beg your pardon, but will this bus take me to Academy City?"

Not only was it polite—it was weird.

Kamijou stopped in his tracks and turned around to face her again. All her skin but her face was hidden, but she was strange—she had quite a rousing chest and a slender waist. (Though depending on how you looked at it, they could seem purposely accented.)

"No, there are no buses going to Academy City."

"I beg your pardon?"

"What I mean is, Academy City is cut off from outside transportation. So buses and trains don't go there. Licensed taxis could bring you in, but it would be cheaper just to walk there normally."

"I see. I understand. Is that why you came out of Academy City on foot, sir?"

The sister said that pretty smoothly, so Kamijou looked back, but he couldn't see the gate from here. He looked at her again to see her rustling around in a sleeve, and then she brought something out. It was a cheap-looking opera glass. "I saw you from here," she said with a smile.

Then, a rickety bus arrived at the equally rickety bus stop.

Its automatic doors opened with a hiss of air being released.

Kamijou didn't have any intention to use the bus, so he decided to walk away from the bus stop a bit.

He looked back over his shoulder to the sister and said, "Anyway, you can't get to Academy City just by going on a bus. If you have a permit, you can just walk to the gate. It should take about seven or eight minutes..."

"Well, well, I see. I am deeply grateful for your advice, despite how busy you must be."

The sister in black smiled at him, bowed her head...

...and got right onto the bus.

"Wa...Hey! I just said not to take the bus like five seconds ago!"

"Oh, yes. You did, didn't you?"

The sister swept up her long skirt in both hands and joyfully alighted from the stopped bus.

He continued. "Like I said, Academy City is cut off from all outside transportation. So buses and trains won't go there. If you want to get into the city, then go walk through the gate, understand?"

"Indeed I have. I apologize for making so much trouble for you."

The sister smiled painfully and bowed her head again to him, then turned, went up the steps, and began to disappear into the bus.

"Hold on!! You weren't listening to a word I said! You were just smiling and nodding!!"

"What? No, I would never do anything like that."

The sister once again joyfully got off the bus. The driver, looking annoyed, closed the bus's automatic doors and floored it.

Kamijou looked at the nun as she absently watched the bus leave, growing intensely worried. If he took his eyes off her for ten seconds, she'd probably get lost.

But the sister, entirely ignorant of his apprehensions, said, "Oh, it seems you are quite frustrated with something. Would you like a piece of candy, perhaps?"

"Look, I'm not really frustrated. Candy? What, is this orange flavored?"

He had taken the orange-colored candy without any hesitation and pretty much unconsciously. He couldn't throw it away at this point, though, so he tossed it into his mouth.

Then...

"Ack, it's bitter! What is this? It's clearly not orange!"

She sighed. "I believe it is sour persimmon candy. I am not familiar with the details, but I hear it is good for when your throat is dry."

"...Right, because it makes your mouth water. But that doesn't mean anything if my body is low on moisture in the first place from walking around in this heat."

"Oh, my. Are you lacking moisture? If you had but said something—I have some tea right here."

"What? Did you just pull a magic bottle out of your habit sleeve? You know what, never mind. I think I'd actually really like that. What's inside?"

"It is roasted barley tea."

"Oh, I'll have some!"

Kamijou was honestly delighted.

(Ice-cold barley tea is perfect for the middle of summer.)

Kamijou thought to himself idly as he took the cup lid of the magic bottle.

"—Ow, it's hot! Why is it boiling?!"

She sighed again. "If I recall correctly, the people of this country appreciate hot drinks during the warmer seasons, don't they?"

"What are you, my grandmother? You're an old lady, aren't you? I thought the way you were talking and acting was suspicious! You think exactly like an old lady, don't you?!" shouted Kamijou, but the sister just stood there with a well-intentioned smile on her face.

He couldn't throw away the cup she'd poured the tea into at this point, though. Trembling, he downed the magma-like liquid.

"...Thanks. Also, I've got a question for you. You said you wanted to go to Academy City, right?"

“Yes, yes.”

“Umm, I mentioned this before, but do you have a city-issued permit?”

“A...permit?”

This startled her, as he expected. You needed a city-issued passport to pass through Academy City’s gates. The reason didn’t need to be explained at this point.

After he told her that, the sister placed a hand on her cheek, worried. “Where might I be able to go so that I can acquire a permit?”

“...I’m sorry, but they won’t let a random person in no matter how hard you try. If you were a relative of a student in the city or a supplier bringing goods or materials, that would be one thing, but even they have to be investigated.”

“I see. Then I guess my only option now is to give up.”

The nun’s shoulders drooped dejectedly. She didn’t seem to want to back down, though—so perhaps Academy City wasn’t necessarily where she needed to go.

(Unfortunately, this is something I can’t do anything about...)

He was stricken with a tinge of guilt, but suddenly he realized that the sister had said “good-bye” and had begun to walk toward Academy City’s gate.

“Get back here, you!! Didn’t you hear me?! You can’t go in without a permit!!”

The sister stopped and turned back as if the thought hadn’t crossed her mind.

Despite having been smiling in such a heartwarming manner the whole time, her face was now rapidly clouding over.

She seemed very worried about something, and he found himself daunted. In reality, magicians could jump over the walls and stuff at will even if they didn’t have permits, but it didn’t seem like she had such skills.

Nevertheless, there was nothing he could do for her right now. To get into Academy City, you needed to have a permit first and foremost. And he had Index to worry about, so he didn’t have the luxury of wasting too much time here, either. Missing the specified time at the specified place was something he absolutely wanted to avoid.

“Hey. Why do you want to go to Academy City?”

The sister sighed once more and tilted her head a bit in worry.

“I am actually on the run right now.”

Kamijou felt the temperature around him decrease.

“On the run...?”

“Yes. There was a slight bit of trouble and I am currently in the midst of my great escape. I had heard Academy City was out of reach of the Church factions, so I wanted to flee there if possible.”

“The Church...Hey, does this have anything to do with magicians?” asked Kamijou.

The sister, visibly surprised, asked, “How do you know of the existence of magicians?”

“Guess I hit a bull’s-eye, judging by that look.” Kamijou sighed. “Academy City, huh? You know, if you’re seriously being chased, then going into the city won’t make you completely safe. Illegal invaders come screaming into the place pretty much all the time.”

He knew about everything revolving around the girl named Index, so he was all too aware that fleeing into the city wouldn’t shake off the magicians’ pursuit.

“Then what should I—?”

The sister’s face was slowly getting to the point where she might cry. He was pretty sure he knew how dangerous these magician people were, so he was hesitant to just leave her here, but...

“—Would you happen to be able to read the bus route map?”

“How many pages ago did we leave that topic?! And this time you added a new term, ‘bus route map’! Where did the issue of whether you could get into Academy City or not go?!” Kamijou shouted. He was thoroughly exasperated at the surprised sister who had backed up to the topic of some minutes earlier.

If magicians were really chasing her, he didn’t think it would be good to ignore her. But he had a situation on his hands and couldn’t afford to take anything lightly. He was worried about Index, who had been kidnapped (apparently). It was a deeply suspicious situation, but he still couldn’t ignore it.

(I don’t want to discard either of them! Jeez, what should I do?!)

Kamijou was about to start frantically scratching his head, when he suddenly realized something.

(Wait...Why don’t I take this nun with me to Index?)

He thought it was a splendid plan.

He did seem to recall something in the threat letter about coming alone, though.

Part 5

Stiyl and Index left Hakumeiza's great hall and walked into the remains of a lobby that must have been where tickets were sold.

A girl wearing a jet-black habit led them a few steps ahead.

She was about one or two years younger than Index, and her hair was a reddish-brown—she was essentially a redhead. Her hair was braided into many strands, each about the thickness of a pencil. The sleeves on the habit she was wearing were long enough to cover her fingertips, but in contrast, her skirt was so short you could see her thighs. Looking closer revealed a fastener-like object on the skirt's edge. She must have taken off a detachable piece of the clothing. Her waist was more slender than Index's, who was still definitely on the skinny side.

She was as tall as Index. But when you followed the sound of her clopping, horse-like footsteps down to her feet, you would find them wearing cork platform sandals thirty centimeters high. They were called chopines, footwear popular in seventeenth-century Italy.

She was a nun of the Roman Catholic Church, and she had introduced herself as Agnese Sanctis.

"The situation is already a mess. We're getting conflicting information, too, so we don't exactly know where Orsola went, I suppose? We don't rightly know if they secured the *Book of the Law*, either, so we're in a pile of trouble."

There were no Japanese people here, but Agnese spoke in fluent Japanese.

"For the moment, our raid against the Amakusa as they were transporting the kidnapped Orsola could be considered a success. Despite one of our people rescuing Orsola, the Amakusa kidnapped her again before they could reunite with the main force. Then, when we took her back a second time, a separate Amakusa group kidnapped her yet again...We've been going around in circles. We spread out our scouting operations too thin, and it came back to bite us. Even though we have more people than they do, each separate group has been losing people, and they've been capitalizing on that. So while we've been stealing and capturing Orsola over and over and over and over again, Orsola herself, whom we should have caught up to by now, has disappeared to who-knows-where."

Agnese's tone was both rough and polite. If she had learned the language on the job, it might have been from talking to Japanese detectives and investigators.

As Stiyl mulled that over, Agnese spun around. Her short skirt fluttered, revealing more of her pale thighs.

"What is it? Oh, I apologize. I can speak English as well, but I can't seem to get my Italian accent out of it. No one usually cares, unless they're from England, anyway. So if you wouldn't mind, I'd prefer to speak in the local language."

Stiyl smoked the cigarette in his mouth, not seeming particularly concerned.

"No, I don't mind much. In fact, I could speak Italian as well."

"Please, don't. If I heard my mother tongue spoken with an English accent, I would be laughing too hard to do my job. We should stick to a language that's foreign for all of us. We won't get into any fights as long as we both sound weird speaking it."

Agnese's platform sandals continued to make a horseshoe-tapping sound.

She had a point, but Stiyl needlessly worried about what language she planned on using with *actual* Japanese people in this country. If those around her couldn't use it in the first place, then he wasn't sure why she needed to learn the country's language.

Index had been silent the whole time. She didn't say a word.

She just pouted. She shot an angry sidelong glance at Stiyl to show that she wasn't talking to him, then returned her gaze to Agnese.

"So the Amakusa Church borrowed the *Book of the Law* and Orsola Aquinas from your home. Do they really threaten you that much?"

"You mean, why is the Roman Catholic Church, the largest religion in the world, having so much trouble, don't you? Well, I don't actually have anything to say to that. We have more in terms of numbers and armament, but they've been disrupting us by using the terrain to their advantage. Japan is their backyard, after all. It does make me pretty mad that we're taking damage from someone with a numbers disadvantage, though. I don't want to admit it, but they're strong."

"...So they won't give in easily, will they?" Stiyl's voice was just slightly bitter.

He'd thought the "walk softly and carry a big stick" idea would have been the fastest and most peaceful way of resolving things, but if the opponent had enough might not to capitulate to your negotiations, the only thing left to do would be a protracted fight.

The longer the battle went on with the Amakusa, the higher the danger that Kanzaki would stick her neck into this. Now that things had come to this, the smoothest option might be to abandon any sense of mercy and take down the Amakusa with one blitz before she noticed.

The Roman Catholic Church's objective was to retake the *Book of the Law* and Orsola Aquinas, not to annihilate the Amakusa Church. If they were to get what they actually wanted, they would likely pull back right away. After that, they just had to worry about ridding the Amakusa of their will to fight.

"I don't know much about the history of Christianity in Japan, but do you know what sort of techniques the Amakusa Church uses? You might be able to set up some amulets or warding circles for searching or defense based on that."

Stiyl had been partners with Kanzaki, former leader of the Amakusa Church, in the past, but he never bothered to try and analyze her techniques. After all, she was one of less than twenty Saints in the world. Even if he did figure them out, a normal person like him would never be able to use them. No human would ever think to measure the distance between the sun and the earth with a fifty-centimeter-long ruler.

Agnese looked worried at the priest's question as well.

"Actually...We haven't been able to properly analyze the Amakusa Church's techniques. If they were based on Xavier's Society of Jesus, then that would mean they were a branch of the Roman Catholic Church, but you can't even *smell* Christianity anymore. There's too much influence from Oriental religions, like Chinese and Japanese ones, mixed in there."

Stiyl still didn't blame Agnese even after hearing that. Just them being able to determine from their skirmishes yesterday that Buddhism and Shinto were mixed into things might have spoken volumes for their analytical abilities.

He looked away from her and to Index, as if interested in her opinion.

She had at least ten thousand times the knowledge of a normal person, so at times like this, she was the unchallenged champion.

The sister all in white spoke in a matter-of-fact tone.

"The Amakusa Church is famous for their secrecy. They're Christians in hiding from the motherland, after all. They thoroughly conceal their Christianity using Buddhism and Shinto, and they hide their techniques and spells within greetings, meals, habits, and behaviors—they hide all traces that Amakusa ever even existed. So the Amakusa doesn't use any obvious incantations or magic circles. Their dishes and bowls, their pots and knives, their bathtubs and beds, their whistling and humming...They use seemingly everyday, ubiquitous concepts for their magic. I don't think even professional magicians

would be able to figure out the Amakusa's spells, even if they saw them. I mean, it wouldn't look like anything except a normal kitchen or bathroom."

Stiyl slowly moved the cigarette in his mouth up and down.

"Which means they're essentially specialists in Idol Theory. Hmm. They seem more suited for long-range sniping combat than close-range melee combat. Though we can only pray they're not part of something like the Gregorian Chant."

"No, not at all. Even when Japan is in isolation, they aggressively absorb the cultures of other countries. They possess close-quarters combat techniques as well—original methods fused from all manner of sword arts both from the east and west. They could be swinging around anything from katana to zweihänders."

"...They're warriors and scholars both, huh? What a pain in the ass," spat Stiyl resentfully.

Incidentally, Agnese, who had at some point been driven outside the ring of the conversation, was shyly kicking her toes lightly against the lobby floor. Her short skirt fluttered every time she kicked it. Her feet made clapping sounds, which sounded a little silly.

"So how far out does your search go for the *Book of the Law* and Orsola? We probably shouldn't be standing around, either. Where should we look?"

"Ah, right. We're handling the search on our end, so it's fine."

With the conversation now back on track, Agnese straightened up a bit hastily.

"We practically have a patent on human wave tactics. Even now, we're doing it with a group of two hundred and fifty people. Nothing will change by adding one or two more, and you're under different command anyway, so it would actually run the risk of getting confusing."

"So then why did you call us out here?"

Stiyl frowned just a little, while the corners of Agnese's mouth curled into a smile.

"It's simple. We want you to investigate what we cannot."

"Like what? There's no church in Japan directly administrating Anglicanism. In terms of places you couldn't search if we refused to help, it's pretty much just the British Embassy."

“No, there’s also Academy City.” Agnese waved one hand in the air. “Considering the occasion, it’s not impossible. If Orsola fled into Academy City, Amakusa wouldn’t be able to get to her. Or, rather, it would be more difficult to follow her. So I want you two to get in contact with the city. The Roman Catholic Church has no connection to it, so it would be a pain for us to do it.”

“I see...However, you might have told us a little bit earlier. I sort of wish I could make my past self ask you sooner.”

As could be understood from Index having been entrusted to Academy City, there was a slender thread connecting the city to the Anglican Church. It was just barely significant enough to say there was diplomatic relations, but that was enough to make it far easier for them to contact the city than it would have been for the Roman Catholic Church, who had no such connection.

“...But that would mean she’s fled into quite the troublesome spot.”

“This is just a possibility. Let’s pray that Lady Orsola at least has that much discretion. Anyway, about how long would it take to get in touch with them and confirm?”

“Right, it wouldn’t be just a phone call. I would have to contact St. George’s Cathedral first, and then have them put me through to Academy City...Even if I told them it was an emergency, it would probably take anywhere from seven to ten minutes. Also, if we get permission to intrude upon the city, things will turn into a hassle. It’s technically possible to sneak in, but realistically, I’d want to avoid that.”

“Oh, you can just ask them for now, so if you could do that quickly that would be gre—”

Agnese suddenly paused in the middle of her sentence and froze.

He followed her gaze to the entrance of the building in the front of the lobby. It was a large entryway with five glass double doors.

“What is it? What’s wr—”

Stiyl also stopped mid-question.

“?”

Finally, Index followed where they were looking.

On the other side of the glass entryway was an open square of asphalt that used to be a parking lot. Despite the size of the building, it was an extremely small space. There should have been nothing there at the moment but robust weeds growing through the hardened cracks in its surface...but in the former parking lot that should have been empty, there was something.

Or rather, there was somebody.

“Oh, it’s Touma!”

Index said the name of a familiar boy.

“Or...sola...Aquinas?”

Agnese spoke the name of the sister in black walking next to the boy.

The two whose names had been voiced didn’t seem to have noticed the magicians inside Hakumeiza yet.

Part 6

A little while earlier...

Though the evening sun was cooler than other times, Kamijou was cursing the heavy manual labor of walking three kilometers in the summertime.

(C-come to think of it, I was already totally beat from gym class and that other stuff today...)

He had left his wallet in his dorm, so obviously walking was his only method of transportation.

The sister in black walking beside him didn’t have any money, either. He couldn’t help but wonder how in the world she planned on actually taking the bus. Dripping with sweat from all that had happened, he had trekked three kilometers down the road in the harsh last heat wave of summer in September and had arrived at Hakumeiza, but...

“Umm...Sister-san? You’re wearing black clothing in this blazing heat. How are you going along smiling and not sweating at all?”

“Well, the agony of the flesh is nothing compared to the agony of the soul.”

“...You’re a nun *and* a masochist?”

“Excuse me, but how much longer must we walk until we arrive at the bus stop?”

“Are you still on that whole bus joke?! I told you we were going to go see a guy from the Anglican Church! Were you just ignoring every single thing I said back there or what?!”

“Oh, my. Please excuse my rudeness—you seem to be sweating quite a bit.”

“Argh! You keep taking the conversation in totally different directions!!”

“Now, now. I will wipe your sweat for you, so please hold still for just a moment.”

“Eh, what? Hey, wait, brfgh!?”

The sister suddenly took a handkerchief out of her sleeve and wiped his face. It was only a handkerchief, but it was made of expensive-looking lace, and was faintly warm, and smelled like roses. He tried to escape from it, but she was pressing it against his face unexpectedly hard, so he couldn’t.

“There, there. All finished.”

The sister smiled at him brightly enough to shoot sunbeams at him.

“...Well, thanks.”

Exhausted, Kamijou stepped into the site of the Hakumeiza theater.

Though the building looked giant even from far away, the parking lot right out front was so small it must have been for employees only. It was probably because there was a train station nearby, as well as a parking garage next door. The property was enclosed with two meter-tall metal plates, but the entrance for workers to go in and out had been forcibly opened—a thick chain and padlock were lying on the ground.

There was no heavy construction equipment or anything of the sort in the tiny parking lot. Even the building itself had no trace of graffiti or broken glass. Perhaps they’d found a buyer for it and someone came to do periodic maintenance on it.

When he and Orsola approached, they could see that Hakumeiza was larger than a gymnasium and constructed in a perfect square. Maybe it resembled a famous theater somewhere, and maybe it was just that designing the building had been a pain.

(All right, I guess they’re inside. It’s hot out here, after all.)

He directed his gaze to Hakumeiza’s entrance. It was large, with five glass double doors lined up. There were no boards or anything in the way. It was less of a ruin and more just closed for a while.

As he thought about this, one of the five doors in front of him opened up.

“Huh?” he grunted.

Out of the three that exited, he recognized two of them as Index and Stiyl.

The last one—he didn't know her. She was a foreigner who looked a little younger than Index. She was dressed in the same black habit as the nun he'd met at the bus stop. However, this girl's habit had been made into a pretty small miniskirt—she must have undone the fasteners on the skirt to remove that part. His eyes fell to her feet, and to his surprise, she was wearing wooden sandals with soles thirty centimeters high.

As soon as Index saw Kamijou, she burst out, "Touma, where did you meet that sister?"

"...That didn't take long. Anyway—and this question is mainly for the evil priest next to you—but why did you bother with such an elaborate faked kidnapping again? And I would definitely like to know why you made me exhaust myself by walking three kilometers in this insane heat! Please, go ahead! Actually, no—you're gonna tell me whether you like it or not!!"

Stiyl turned a tired expression on the shouting Kamijou. "Ah, what? So you knew it was a trick. I wanted to call you out here to get you to help search for someone. I just used the Index as a decoy. By the way, this is the one in charge here. She's Agnese Sanctis, from the Roman Catholic Church."

Stiyl pointed in her general direction with the tip of his cigarette, and the nun wearing the platform sandals bowed and said, "H-hi." It looked like she was aware already that Japanese people bowed their heads all the time, but her motion was exaggerated, making her look like a hotel worker.

Kamijou was a little embarrassed at someone he'd never seen before suddenly addressing him. He was currently at max anger, but he couldn't let himself vent it on someone he had no acquaintance with.

As if pressing him hard now that his pace had been broken, Stiyl said, "Sorry, but we don't have time to go along with your nonsense. Like I said before, I brought you here to have you help look for someone. Two hundred and fifty people are looking for her now, and yet they can't locate her. It's a race against time. Her life is on the line, so we need you to help us quickly."

"Nonsense...? Hey, that's no way to treat a guest you're asking for help! Damn it, what is this? What do you mean her life is on the line? Explain it to me! And besides, I'm an amateur! I have no skill at tracking people down! Don't leave such an important job to a high school student!"

"Oh, everything is all right. If you just hand over the nun next to you, that'll be fine."

"What?" Kamijou's eyes became pinpoints.

Stiyl, who seemed to think this was truly foolish, exhaled cigarette smoke. “That nun is the missing person we were looking for. Her name is Orsola Aquinas. All right, thank you very much. You did very well. You can go home now, Kamijou Touma.”

“...Excuse me, but I was set up in all this, and in addition to having left the city with a suspiciously acquired Academy City exit permit in one hand, I walked three kilometers when it’s almost forty degrees out. What’s my position in all this?” Kamijou muttered, looking down. However...

“I already said you did well, didn’t I? You want me to treat you to some shaved ice or something?”

Index’s face turned blue and panicky at seeing Kamijou Touma looking down and grinding his teeth.

They heard a funny noise come from around Kamijou’s temples.

“You know, until now, I know we’re not what you could call *friends*, but we were getting along just fine otherwise. I’m serious. I seriously thought that, you know? Yeah, at least, until this moment!!”

“Enough of your jokes. Just hand Orsola over to Agnese already. What? You want me to pay more attention to you? Unfortunately, I can’t take away your loneliness, and I wouldn’t want to anyway because it would be creepy.”

On top of getting seriously angry, having been ignored so briefly caused Kamijou to collapse where he stood, as if he had burned out. “Urgh, uuuuuuurrrrrrgh. I don’t even have the energy to make dinner tonight anymore. Index, we’ll have to have commonplace takeout pork bowl for dinner tonight.”

Kamijou ignored the always-hungry girl shouting, “What?! But Touma!!” and turned back to face the sister in all black, Orsola Aquinas.

“...You did say someone was after you. Did this search have something to do with it? You should be fine now that your allies are here, right?”

When Kamijou addressed her, Orsola’s shoulders gave a jerk for some reason. It was a small tremble, like she had tried to suppress it and failed.

He tilted his head. She seemed to be looking at Stiyl and the others, not at him.

Stiyl closed one eye, uninterested. “Hmm. There’s no need to be anxious. We Anglicans are getting out of here as soon as our job is done. Well, I suppose you should at least have that much caution.”

For an outsider like Kamijou, everyone looked lumped together as either “someone from the Church” or “someone belonging to the magic world.”

He wondered, though, if they were viewing one another as hostile and subdividing them into Roman or English or whatever. But then...

“Oh, no. I can’t give her to you so easily.”

Suddenly, they heard a deep, male voice.

Unnaturally, it came to Kamijou from straight above. He looked up to the night sky and saw a paper balloon about the size of a softball floating around seven meters up in the air.

The thin paper making up the balloon was vibrating of its own accord, creating the man’s voice he had just heard.

“Orsola Aquinas. You should know that best of all. You could live a much more meaningful life with us than you could going back to the Roman Catholic Church.”

That moment.

With a sharp sound, a single blade plunged out of the ground in between Kamijou and Orsola. It came close to being a surprise attack to the spots of Kamijou and the others, whose attention had been directed overhead.

And then two more came up around Orsola with the same noise!!

The swords that leaped out at them slid in a straight line through the ground like a shark fin cutting across the surface of the water. The three blades cut across the ground, carving out a triangle two meters on each side with Orsola at the center.

“Aahh!” As Orsola felt gravity give way, she gave a cry that sounded more bewildered than afraid. But before it could turn into a clear scream, Orsola’s body began to plunge into the dark underground along with the entire triangular piece of asphalt.

“Amakusa!!” shouted Agnese, trying to reach her hand out, but she was too late. Orsola was already being swallowed up into the pit of darkness. Kamijou frantically ran to the edge of the hole and swore angrily.

“Shit, a sewer...?!”

The paper balloon overhead continued in an enthusiastic yet still focused voice.

“If we simply follow the Roman Catholic commander, it did not matter where Orsola Aquinas flees or who she is captured by—she would eventually be brought here. I suppose running around underground waiting was well worth it!!”

Kamijou couldn’t get even a marginal hold on this situation. Who was hiding in the sewers? For what reason had they suddenly taken Orsola away?

He knew one thing, though.

They came out suddenly and without warning with blades and had kidnapped someone. And from what it sounded like, it was not just a random occurrence, but something they had planned beforehand and had waited and waited for their chance to come.

“Damn it!!”

Kamijou peered into the triangular hole in the ground. As it was dark, his depth perception was a little off, but it didn’t seem too steep to him. He faced the hole, about to jump in, when...

“Wait! Don’t do it, Touma!!”

The very moment Index shouted...

Light glinted off dozens of blades in the darkness.

As if reflecting a little bit of light from the evening sun, the orange rays radiated and twisted inside the sewer. With the light from the blades, only the faint outlines of those hidden underground came into view. The sight reminded him of bandits wielding rusted swords and axes, waiting with bated breath in the thickets beside a thin mountain trail for their sacrifices to pass by.

A ball of pure malice blew straight into his face like a burst of hot wind.

In an instant, Stiyl, beside Kamijou, whose movements had been locked down, pulled out cards with runes inscribed on them.

He threw the four cards on the ground, positioning them around himself.

“TIAFIMH (There is a fire in my hand), IHTSOAS (it has the shape of a sword), AIHTROC (and it has the role of conviction)!!” Stiyl shouted, flicking his cigarette directly upward. An orange trail followed it up, and in the next moment, a sword made of flames jumped into his hand along that line.

The newly created source of powerful light immediately wiped away the darkness in the sewer.

Stiyl brought the flame sword around in a large arc...but then stopped suddenly.

Inside the sewer illuminated by the flame sword, there was nobody. All those people had vanished into thin air along with the darkness that had been wiped away. All of those silhouettes in the hole holding swords, as well as Orsola, who should have fallen in, had disappeared in the blink of an eye—like a pack of sea lice attached to a riverbank all running away at once.

The paper balloon that had been lazily floating overhead slowly descended to them.

Nobody reached out a hand for it as it fell into the triangular carved hole in the ground.

“Shit! What the hell is going on here?” demanded Kamijou as if spitting something out. “Hey! You’re gonna explain this to me in full, right?”

“Actually, I am the one who’d like an explanation for this,” responded Stiyl Magnus, as if to crush the paper balloon under his foot.

Between the Lines 1

At last, the sun set on the shore, fortified with man-made objects, and the night was welcomed in.

It was a craggy area only a few hundred meters from a swimming beach. Just onshore was a cliff almost ten meters tall, and tetrapods were piled up high so that waves wouldn’t erode it.

Now that the sun had completely set, the sea was covered in a deep black.

Then, as if awaiting the night’s arrival, a hand appeared from the surface of the dark water.

It wasn’t just a hand—it was a covered one. Heavily armored fingers, shining in silver, grabbed hold of one of the concrete tetrapods. Then, a person in Western-style full-plate armor broke the surface of the water and climbed up onto it. Clad in steel from head to toe, it was questionable whether there was even a person inside.

When the first one made it to land, twenty more of the “knights” emerged from the water’s surface. One after another, they climbed atop the tetrapods, emulating the first. The lettering emblazoned on the arms of their armor read UNITED KINGDOM—letters that also represented the nation called England.

They had swum here.

That wasn't a figure of speech. They had begun in England, rounded the Cape of Good Hope, passed through the Indian Ocean, and had at last infiltrated the water of faraway Japan.

It was a spell for manipulating ocean currents using the legend of Saint Blaise as a framework. Simply put, this was a technique for high-speed sea travel that allowed one to go fast enough to circumnavigate the earth in three days. It was not a spiritual item attached to their armor—it was something activated purely by each individual knight's own body. The armor they currently wore had no such functionality. Because the knights themselves were so highly maneuverable, adding a spiritual item to the armor would have just slowed them down. With their tremendous strength, they could go on rampages more violent than effects produced by a spiritual item, so they would have run the risk of destroying their armor with their own power.

They were simply called the Order of the Knights.

They had once gone by names such as "Seventh Macer" and "Fifth Axer" in England but had abandoned such titles seven years ago. That was not because the current Order had lost its outstanding individuality, but because the Order had been reborn by each knight having acquired every skill.

The reason they needed to acquire such strength was related partly to circumstances particular to England and partly to the original objective of establishing the Order.

Right now, the United Kingdom operated under a complex three-sided chain of command.

The Queen Regnant and the Royal Family Faction, headed by Parliament.

The Knight Leader and the Knight Faction, commanding the knights.

The Archbishop and the Anglican Church Faction, led by the faithful.

Their power relation was as follows.

The Royal Family Faction issued royal commands to the Knight Faction, controlling them.

The Knight Faction used the Anglican Church Faction as convenient tools.

The Anglican Church Faction gave direction to the Royal Family Faction under the name of Church advice.

In this beautifully triangular system, if one attempted to carry out an agenda while even one of the others was not convinced of the policies therein, the other could present total opposition by taking the long way around the chain. However, there was another reason that the United Kingdom was said to have the world's most complex Christian culture.

The United Kingdom was a combination of nations consisting of England, the northern part of Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. Reminders of this remained to this day—certain places even issued their own currency.

For example, there could be bad blood between the Anglican Church Faction's English and Welsh members, despite them belonging to the same group. Conversely, it wasn't unusual for separate factions within one nation, like the Anglican Church and Knight Factions of Scotland, having pipelines to each other. When Sherry Cromwell, the code-breaking expert, bared her fangs at the Anglican Church—which she belonged to—she had this sort of backing in addition to her personal motive.

Three factions and four cultures.

This two-dimensional diagram where each affected the other led to the nation called England becoming more complex. In turn, the greatest mission given to the Knight Faction was to *make sure this complex combination of countries didn't break apart in midair*.

Thus, these particular knights hadn't been persuaded beforehand...

...that the Anglicans—the Anglican Church Faction—had gained the same power as the Knight Faction.

The Anglican Church had originally been created to oppose the Roman Catholic Church, which had the entire world under its rule. They wanted to operate their own nation themselves, but if they didn't obey the Roman Catholic Church, they would be attacked as a nation that disobeyed the teachings of the Christian god. So by placing an independent church within England, they could explain themselves by saying their actions were in line with the teachings of the god of Christianity—meaning Anglicanism—even if they weren't strictly following Roman Catholic canon.

In other words, the Anglican Church had been created as a political tool.

The Church was the oil they had created to lubricate the giant cogs of the royal family and the knights under its command.

But right now, the relationship between the Anglican Church, the royal family, and knights was being undermined by the Anglican chain of command.

Actually, though, with Knight Leader and Queen Regnant as their masters, the knights would not only cut corners when carrying out the Archbishop's orders—in severe cases, they'd outright spurn them.

Their answer to their current mandate, to support the rescue operation of the *Book of the Law* and Orsola Aquinas, had been simple: All members of the Amakusa Church should be killed.

They had no obligation to put their lives on the line for an order from someone who didn't acknowledge them—the Archbishop.

They didn't take their religious and ethical relationships with the Roman Catholic Church or the Amakusa Church even slightly into consideration.

It wouldn't affect England's national interests in the least if the Amakusa Church were to disappear.

It would be easy to kill them. The skills of the knights—the many works passed down through legend by the Murder Crusaders, who buried multitudes of heretics during the Crusades—were powerful enough to wipe a small island off the map.

A sect on a far eastern island nation, they could destroy within a day.

And they wouldn't care what happened to the possible hostage, Orsola, in the process.

The Anglican Church didn't actually have any interest in the contents of the *Book of the Law*. They were already recorded in the Index's memories, so they just needed to leave it to her. Whether Orsola lived or died, it wouldn't damage English interests. The Roman Catholic Church might cause a fuss about it, but the chore of suppressing that would fall to the Archbishop.

The Archbishop had warned them to be careful of what action Kanzaki Kaori, former leader of the Amakusa Church, might take, but the knights were far from taking that piece of advice to heart. If Kanzaki Kaori came upon them, blinded with rage over Amakusa being annihilated, they would just make her into a bloodstain on the wall as well.

Or they would have.

But all those plans went awry in just three seconds.

Once the knights had broken the surface and climbed atop the tetrapods...

...*It* appeared from below and pierced through them.

The many tetrapods, each weighing more than a ton, blew away like a volcano had erupted. The knights on them, having also been thrown upward, recovered their balance in midair and scanned the surface below to look for a landing point.

At ground zero—the center of where the twenty-one knights and vastly numerous tetrapods had gone flying—was a lone girl.

She had long black hair tied in the back, white skin covered in lithe muscles, a squeezed short-sleeved T-shirt, jeans with one leg cut off, western boots, and a katana more than two meters long called the Shichiten Shichitou resting on the leather belt at her waist.

Kanzaki Kaori.

She didn't speak. She began her attack on the twenty-one airborne knights without a word.

It was a simple thing she was doing. She would attack each of the twenty-one knights, one at a time, who were floating without footing and unable to move. Not by using her sword to slash, either—but by politely bashing them with its sheath.

But she was so desperately fast. Too fast.

The knights hadn't actually been in the air for one second yet. But they all immediately felt like they had been frozen in midair. That was how fast Kanzaki's movements were. It was like time had stopped, and she alone was moving through it freely.

If someone had been observing time properly, it would have looked like an invisible storm erupting from ground zero.

Each knight that took a hit from the scabbard crashed into the ground, sank into the cliff face, or struck the road on the shore. Those launched into the sea skipped across it like a thrown pebble.

After mowing down twenty-one knights in all, Kanzaki quietly landed atop one of the tetrapods.

When the damp night wind lightly caressed her hair, the floating knights at last fell to the ground. A loud noise echoed across the dark seashore.

"I tried to hold back. This way, there would be no fatalities. Wearing sturdy armor made my job easier, and for that I thank you."

"You...bastard..."

The knights took her quiet voice as an insult and tried to stand. But they had been utterly shaken to their cores, and moving their fingers was all they could manage.

That's why the knights instead moved their mouths—the one thing they could still operate freely.

"Do you...understand? Who you just...attacked? You've just bitten the hand...of the three contracts and four lands...of the United Kingdom itself!"

"I, too, am a part of it. I'm sure those above me will take care of this, as it was trouble not between us and the Roman Catholic Church or the Russian Orthodox Church, but within the Anglican Church itself...Oh." She realized the knight who had spoken had lost consciousness, and she promptly stopped talking.

“There were some I tossed into the ocean...But it didn’t look like they had disengaged their submersible technique yet, so I don’t believe I must worry about them drowning,” whispered Kanzaki to herself, glancing once at the dark surface of the sea.

“Your words lack punch when you say them with such worry on your face, you know.”

“Hm?” Kanzaki Kaori finally stirred and turned around to the familiar voice. It was a young man with short, spiky blond hair, blue sunglasses, a Hawaiian shirt, and shorts.

Tsuchimikado Motoharu.

Kanzaki saw where he was standing and was surprised. Her honed senses wouldn’t have missed someone’s approach in the first place...Nevertheless, when she looked at Tsuchimikado, ten meters away, she still couldn’t feel his presence.

“Have you come to stop me?”

When Kanzaki reached for the hilt of her katana, the eyes behind the sunglasses remained smiling.

“Give it a rest, Kanzaki Kaori. You can’t beat me.” Despite the situation, he showed no nervousness, held no weapon, and didn’t even position himself for a fight. “No matter how strong *you* might be, you can’t kill people. And an esper like me might die just from using magic to fight you. This battle...I would die whether I won or lost, but are you really prepared to kill Kamikaze Boy Tsuchimikado and keep moving forward? Eh?”

Kanzaki clenched her teeth.

She manipulated her techniques so that people wouldn’t die. For Kanzaki, a fight in which someone would die whether they won or lost held no meaning. In fact, that was the worst outcome she could imagine.

She could feel her fingers trembling as they touched her katana’s hilt.

Then Tsuchimikado pulled a one-eighty and switched to an innocent, childlike grin. “That’s fine, you can keep glaring. I wasn’t told to stop ya personally, Nee-chin. Though I was told to head you off and eliminate you if it looked like you were gonna cause an issue. And I’ve got my own job to do anyway.”

“Your...own job?”

“Yeah. I got the cushy job of digging around for the original copy of the *Book of the Law* while the Roman Catholic Church and the Amakusa are preoccupied with their little firefight.”

Kanzaki’s eyes narrowed slightly. “On whose orders? The Anglican Church’s or Academy City’s?”

“I wonder. Well, common sense will lead you to the answer. Which wants grimoires—the magical world or the scientific world, hmm? Well, considering which I’m the spy for, it’s pretty easy to figure out.”

Kanzaki fell mum at Tsuchimikado’s words.

There was a terrible air dominating the area, one that could freeze even the tropical night wind flowing between them.

Seconds of silence ensued, and the first one to break eye contact was Kanzaki.

“...I need to go. If you want to report this to your superiors, feel free.”

“Is that so? Ah, we’ll handle rounding up all these groggy guys. It’d be a pain if the police picked ‘em up, after all.”

“I’m in your debt.” Kanzaki bowed her head courteously.

Tsuchimikado said to her, “By the way, what brought you so far from England anyway, Nee-chin?”

She left her head down and stopped moving.

After a good ten seconds had passed, she finally lifted her face.

“Who knows...?” she said, smiling mechanically, like she was angry and about to cry at the same time.

“...Honestly, what *do* I want to do?”

CHAPTER 2

Roman Orthodox Church.

The_Roman_Catholic_Church.

Part 1

The sun set and night came.

But it didn't come quietly. Agnese, in her black nun's habit, was busy shouting to the other similarly dressed sisters in another language, giving commands and pointing every which way. She was also writing something in a small book with a quill pen at an incredible speed. Index told Kamijou it was like a telephone call: When she wrote in that book, the letters would apparently show up in a book somewhere else. He thought privately that it was more like a text message than a phone call.

A brigade in black—probably the regular sisters of the Roman Catholic Church—was heading into the sewers via the triangular hole left by Orsola's kidnappers. Another group spread open a map and began to draw lines in red ink, also with feather pens. He couldn't tell whether they were designating escape routes or giving directions for the search or their security net.

On this busy, bustling night, Kamijou, Index, and Stiyl were stiffly standing apart from the others. Kamijou couldn't speak a foreign language (and no, he didn't even know *which* foreign language they were speaking in), so he couldn't participate in the conversation. Index and Stiyl were keeping quiet. If they said anything careless, it could spark chaos among the Roman Catholic sisters—they were part of a different chain of command.

Remembering how hungry he was little by little, Kamijou spoke up. "Hey, why did Index and I get called out here, anyway? The Roman Catholic people are doing everything that needs to be done. We're just sitting here bored—is there a reason we're still here?"

"...Well, our reinforcements should be arriving somewhat soon. What are those knights doing?" Stiyl said bitterly, blowing out some cigarette smoke. "Also, this incident requires our power. Well, more accurately, *her* power."

"Her" must have meant Index.

“Hers?”

“Yeah. This all has to do with a grimoire. And not just any grimoire—the original copy of the *Book of the Law*.”

In place of Stiyl, who said so in a relatively self-absorbed fashion (meaning he had no desire to explain), Index summed it up in simple terms for him.

According to her, the *Book of the Law* was a grimoire written in a code that nobody in the world could decipher. Its contents were very valuable; anyone who could decipher it would gain vast power. And now a girl had appeared who had finally come up with a way to decode the supposedly indecipherable grimoire.

Because of that, both the *Book of the Law* and Orsola Aquinas, the girl who could decipher it, had been taken from the Roman Catholic Church by the Amakusa-style Christian Church.

The one he had met already was Orsola, and it seemed that she had fled during the chaotic battles between Amakusa and the Roman Catholic Church, which involved her being kidnapped and rescued over and over. And they speculated the reason they didn’t know where the *Book of the Law* was, was because it was in the Amakusa’s hands at the moment.

(Amakusa-style...Amakusa?)

Kamijou tilted his head—he’d heard that name before.

But anyway.

“Nobody can decipher it, huh? Not even you, Index?”

“No! I’ve tried to, but it’s not written in normal code.”

“Hey. Is this unreadable grimoire really that valuable? I mean, nobody’s read it, so couldn’t it just be scribbles inside?”

“It could be,” Index agreed simply. But the fact that she didn’t get angry made her seem relaxed, like an adult admonishing a child—as though he were an ignorant amateur meddling in a professional’s business.

Stiyl spat out his now-short cigarette and crushed it with his foot.

“The techniques written in the *Book of the Law* are simply too powerful—it’s said that using them would declare the end of the entire Christian-dominated world. It has a pretty interesting history. We don’t even *want* to confirm whether it’s truth or fiction—if it’s sealed up, then obviously we’d rather leave it alone. After all, according to one theory, it lets you use angelic techniques beyond the comprehension of man.”

Kamijou froze upon hearing those words.

“A-angelic?”

“Yes? Perhaps that’s a little fanciful for an unbeliever like you to imagine.”

Stiyl sounded like he was ridiculing him, but he was wrong.

Kamijou knew. He knew the meaning behind the word “angel”. He knew what the angel called Power of God had done. That spell it had used on one seashore that summer night—the one that had instantly covered the entire sky in a vortex of enormous magic circles. He knew of the “miracle” that could reduce half the world to ashes. And even that was probably nothing more than a fraction of the kind of techniques angels used.

Giving that to a person, to be used at will?

He gulped. “But...still, if nobody’s ever decoded it before, then it might not even be real,” he said.

Index’s head bobbed up and down. “Yep. But when it comes to the *Book of the Law*, it probably *is*, Touma. The magician who strove to pen it is legendary at this point. It’s so high-level it could even appear in the New Testament. He was only active around seventy years ago, but it wouldn’t be going too far to say he rewrote whole millennia of magical history. About twenty percent of magicians in today’s world are his followers and imitators. And something like *fifty* percent of them are affected by him in some way. He was the real deal.” Her words were serious, and Kamijou found himself unable to carelessly get a word in. “I think the *Book of the Law* is real. I wouldn’t even be surprised if it was even crazier than the rumors, either.”

A few sisters in black ran by them.

After a few seconds, Kamijou finally spoke up. “Umm...Who is *he*?”

“Edward Alexander. He’s also known as Crowley. He’s buried in a graveyard in the English countryside now.” Stiyl lit a new cigarette. “In a word, he is recorded as the *worst* human in history. In one experiment during his travels, he used his wife, who had been traveling around the world with him, as a vessel so he could contact the guardian angel Aiwass. And when his daughter Lilith died, he used her to construct a theory of magick without twitching an eyebrow. And he apparently sacrificed girls the same age as his daughter in *that* experiment...However, his accomplishments *did* lead to new definitions of other worlds—overlapping planes in different layers than our world, such as the celestial and demonic planes—and revolutionized magic at the time.”

Stiyl adjusted his position because the wind had changed direction. It looked like he didn’t want the smoke to go toward Index, but instead it ended up coming straight to Kamijou. He coughed hard, and Stiyl gave a truly evil smile, bellowing smoke out of his mouth like a fire-breathing monster.

“Well, the many stories about him, good and bad, just and evil, big and small, are well-known to magicians. It’s the same for the *Book of the Law*. When he lost his way, he would perform bibliomancy with the *Book of the Law* and choose his original path from its contents. In other words, it has the turning points of the world’s greatest magician—it is a grimoire holding the reins of modern western magic history as a whole. It would be wise to consider that it has quite a history attached, yes?”

Stiyl clicked his tongue as if his own words tired him.

The Roman Catholic sisters who had passed by them earlier returned, going the other way. One held a giant cog one meter across as she ran—was it used as a weapon or for some other purpose?—and she made a slightly disgusted face at the smell of cigarette smoke.

“Wait, so if you’re sure it’s such a crazy book, why not just get rid of it? It’s a book, right? Just burn it or something.”

“You can’t burn grimoires. Especially not original copies. The letters, phrases, and sentences written within use the flow of energy within the earth as a power source to convert to magical code and turn into an automatic magic circle. So just sealing one away is the best we can do.” Index smiled vaguely. “But if I dug the original out of my memories and wrote a copy of it, it wouldn’t do anything like that.”

“You still need someone’s mana, even if it’s weak, to activate an automatic magical circle like that. The *writer’s own mana* is used as the starter to rev up the engine, basically. Most magicians writing a grimoire don’t even notice that their mana is being inscribed along with the characters they write. You wouldn’t be able to avoid it even if you knew—it happens no matter what kind of writing utensils or paper you’re using. But she doesn’t have the power to temper her life force and create mana, so that wouldn’t be a problem. Most suitable for one who manages a library, wouldn’t you say?...Though the fact that this state of affairs was deliberate is *quite* displeasing.”

“Hmm. Is that right, Index?”

“Uh, huh? Starter? What does rev up mean?”

Index was the one he was looking to for more explanation, but she looked the most confused of all.

Stiyl faithfully tried to explain what the words “rev up” and “starter” meant. (For some reason, he looked a little happy about it.) Kamijou watched him out of the corner of his eye and grimaced to himself.

He hadn’t thought this was such a big deal at first. Until a few moments ago, he had figured that as long as they rescued Orsola, everything would work out.

But now that didn’t seem to be the case.

He knew what an angel was. He knew about the technique used by Misha Kreutzev, Power of God, that could burn down half the planet.

He knew what a magician was. Those he had met so far didn't show mercy or hold back. They would set to work achieving their goals using all the power at their disposal.

What if one of those magicians got ahold of the angel skills from the *Book of the Law*?

(Shit)...

Index said that original copies of grimoires couldn't be burned.

She said the reason was that the book itself would turn into an automatic magic circle.

But if Kamijou used his right hand...

If he used the Imagine Breaker inside it, then maybe...

(This is the worst. It doesn't look like I can get off this ride while it's still going!)

Part 2

Finally finished giving orders in a foreign language, Agnese walked over to Kamijou and the others, her short skirt fluttering in the breeze. Her strangely high platform sandals made a sound similar to that of a horse's hooves.

Kamijou winced to himself. She was a little younger than Index, but magic types didn't seem to care much about seniority. He could tell that much just by seeing the strange nuns from the Anglican Church and the Russian Orthodox Church (well, in the latter case, he only had Misha's outward appearance to go by). On top of that, until a few moments ago, she had been coolly flinging orders in some other language directly to dozens, and through indirect communication with hundreds more.

But *his* problem was less how self-important she seemed and more the foreign language part. His mental situation could be summed up in one sentence as "How to deal with foreign languages you can't speak: If she talks to you, your only choice is spirited, high-speed body language!!"

Agnese was on her way over, ready to attempt a culture exchange in a different language at any second. He held his head up straight and steeled himself for a beautiful interpretive dance, when...

"Ah, erm, I...If you don't mind, I now would like to start explaining the current situation, so are you all quite prepared, mayhap, pray tell?"

"..."

It was Japanese.

(What the heck? She may be unique, but this is...)

The Roman Catholic sister was holding herself somewhat tightly. She wobbled uncertainly, and her face was bright red.

(I see—it doesn't matter where you go, people are always nervous about foreigners fast-talking them.)

Kamijou nodded to himself, oddly convinced.

Agnese continued. "I-I'm sorry. I seem to be somewhat nervous speakin' Japanese poorly around actual Japanese people. Ah, could I use a different language? One apart from both of our cultural spheres, if you don't mind, like, preferably maybe Avar, or a Berber language..."

She spoke super fast. Index said something in a foreign language that was probably along the lines of "calm down and take deep breaths!" He glanced over to see Stiyl looking down darkly, saying, "Well, you're not the only one I know who uses strange Japanese," an explanation nobody was really asking for.

Agnese placed a hand on her flat chest and took a few deep breaths. She was forcibly trying to suppress her agitation. And despite probably being used to wearing the thirty-centimeter platform sandals, her feet wobbled like a drunk, helped along by her nervousness.

But she was still trying to carry out her duty, so she straightened right up and said, "I apologize. I shall start again. In terms of our current and future actions, we—Hyaa?!"

Before she could finish speaking, Agnese, who had forced herself to stand up straight despite her quivering feet, completely lost her balance and toppled over backward. "Wah, wah!" Her hands swam through the air as if she were grasping at straws, and then one latched on to Kamijou's hand.

"Whoa?!"

She fell to the ground, dragging him down with her. Unable to take the fall gracefully because of the suddenness, he slammed onto the asphalt. He attempted to writhe in pain (in relative seriousness) when he suddenly realized there was a piece of cloth fluttering above his head.

It was Agnese's skirt.

When he brought his face up, he saw a paradise spread out a few centimeters away from his nose.

(Wha, whawhawhawhawhawhawhawhawha?!)

The moment the scared Kamijou panicked and tried to pull his neck out, Agnese finally got a grip on the situation. She gave a shrill "Eek?!" and pushed her hands down onto her skirt with all her might to hold it down. It was an action that she'd taken in defense, of course, but she ended up slamming his head down so he couldn't pull it out of her skirt.

His entire field of vision had been blocked off by the skirt and her thighs, but Index's shout still reached his ears.

"T-To-To-To, Toumaaa! You think maybe that's going a little far for pranks?!!"

"No getting hot and bothered during work. Come on, get up already." Stiyl gave him a swift kick in the side, and with that Kamijou finally succeeded in removing himself from the prison of Agnese's skirt and thighs. The kick seemed less like it was Stiyl's own volition and more because he had to do something because Index was yelling.

Having been kicked in the gut, Kamijou coughed and shook his head.

Then his eyes met those of Agnese, who was plopped down on the asphalt. She was trembling, her face was bright red, and there were tears welling up in the corners of her eyes.

He blanched. "I-I'b sowwy..."

"N-no, you don't need to apologize. I was the one who fell over and caused it. It'd seem when I'm nervous, my balance goes a little haywire...Umm, can you stand?"

Agnese stood up adroitly in her thirty-centimeter-tall platform-sandal-clad feet and slowly extended a hand to the battered Kamijou. He made a face like it was a ray of light piercing dark clouds and reached out for it. Index watched and got a little mad.

Maybe Agnese had calmed down a little from that—her body was still tense and bunched up, but the nervousness was fading from her voice.

"All right, then I would like to begin explaining the current trends of the *Book of the Law*, Orsola Aquinas, and the Amakusa, and discuss our actions henceforth and so on."

She was still wobbling nervously, and as if she was scared she'd fall again, she unthinkingly reached out to grab hold of Kamijou's clothing. Her hand stopped partway there, though. She was probably opposed to clinging to a man she'd just met—and besides that, he'd just dove into her skirt a few moments ago. After groping around, she latched on to Index's habit instead.

"Orsola Aquinas has been confirmed to currently be in the Amakusa's hands. That goes for the *Book of the Law* as well, in all likelihood. We have a little less than fifty Amakusa

members involved in this matter. It looks like they're using the sewers to get around, but it is also possible they have already gone aboveground."

"Does that mean you don't know anything?" asked Index, on whom Agnese was leaning, a little painfully.

"Yes. We're tracking the Amakusa's movements using the lingering traces of their mana, but it's not going well. I suppose I expect nothing less from the Amakusa-style Christian Church, considering it's a sect specializing in secrecy and stuff." Still wobbly, Agnese pointed out the triangular hole in the ground. "We have another team drawing a perimeter in conjunction with them, but it looks like they'll be the ones to nail the target first."

"A perimeter...How big is it?" Kamijou asked, tilting his head. Index was staring at him as if pleading him to do something about the heavy Agnese on her, but he decided to ignore her.

"It's about ten clicks in radius, centered here. One hundred thirty-two streets and forty-three sewer passages—you may consider us to have enough allies to cover the entire range." Agnese was practically hugging Index at this point. "Of course, if they try to take the *Book of the Law* and Orsola to their headquarters, they'll have to run into the perimeter somewhere. Our intel says their base's location is apparently somewhere in the Kyushu region...and, well, that *apparently* is another issue. Of course, things will change if they decided not to break through the perimeter and just force the decoding method out of Orsola."

"They probably won't. Even as she is now, Orsola probably readied the knowledge of how to resist mind-reading magic. On the other hand, there's no good place to drag it out of her physically, either." Stiyl gave a puff of cigarette smoke. "There are too many enemies around them for them to settle down. They need to torture Orsola, obtain the decoding method, and create a decoded copy of the *Book of the Law*. I think that's a bit more than one day's work. And if they want to get the information from her and break her spirit without letting her kill herself, the best forms of torture would be those that don't require them to directly touch her—forced menial labor, sleep disturbances, or the like. But they'd need around a week for those. One or two all-nighters isn't enough for torture; the human mind is set up so that it first starts to break at one hundred and twenty hours of sleep deprivation."

Kamijou was dumbfounded at Stiyl's detached words.

Those *were* the words of an expert specializing in witch-hunting and inquisitions, but that expert's point of view was that those who kidnapped Orsola were capable of doing such a thing. And from what Agnese had said, such a group was acting in tandem with almost fifty people.

The Amakusa-style Christian Church.

But something was bothering Kamijou—Oh, right. He'd heard the term "Amakusa" from Kanzaki Kaori and Tsuchimikado Motoharu in the past. He heard that Kanzaki used to be its leader, and that she had left the organization to protect her precious underlings.

Were those people she wanted so much to protect low enough to cause this incident out of greed?

(Or...)

Or had those Kanzaki Kaori wanted to defend...

...Changed after she left them?

"What's wrong, Touma?" Index canted her head to the side, and the action caused her to collide with Agnese's, who was clinging to her.

"Nothing. What should we do at this point, anyway? Those Amakusa guys are gonna run into your perimeter soon, right?"

"Ah, y-yes." Agnese still seemed a little nervous. She was almost pressing herself against Index's cheek. "Basically, I want you to be rear support...The chances are low, but they *could* always use the *Book of the Law*. I think it'd be best if an expert in grimoires was there to—"

"Argh, you're being annoying! I can't breathe!" Index flapped her hands around. "But are we going to be able to catch the Amakusa that easily? Huh, Touma?"

"Why are you asking me? I would think if a group of forty or fifty people was walking around in suspicious nun's habits, they'd stand out no matter what."

"The Amakusa do not have an official uniform, Touma. They specialize in secrecy, so if they were just walking around the city normally, you probably wouldn't be able to tell the difference."

"..."

"What is it, Touma? Why do you look like you don't believe me?"

"Don't worry about it," replied Kamijou. He didn't see a single person dressed normally anywhere around here, so he wasn't sure how universal her definition of normal was.

"Anyway, members of the Amakusa are experts in hiding and fleeing. It would be stranger, I think, if they hadn't predicted what the Roman Catholic Church would bring down on them after they seized the *Book of the Law* and Orsola Aquinas. And if this incident *was* planned out, then they would normally have countermeasures for it."

Agnese, now completely leaning on Index, looked a bit flurried. "B-but in reality, they have no way of busting through our perimeter—"

“Yes they do. There is such magic.”

She sucked in her breath at the immediate response.

“It’s a technique limited to Japan, though. In simple terms, there is a handful of special points throughout Japan called ‘eddies’, and there is a type of map magic that lets you move freely among them.”

“The Great Coastal Map of Japan...Inou Tadataka. I see,” Stiyl muttered bitterly, as if remembering something.

Kamijou had no idea what they were talking about, so he asked. “What’s that? Inou Tadataka...Is he a legendary magician or something?”

His question resulted in everybody there shooting him an ice-cold glare.

“Umm, Touma. The first person to survey and create a map of Japan can be found in timelines in the normal world, you know.”

“You don’t seem to be too knowledgeable about history, hm? You probably don’t even remember five prime ministers back, do you?”

“...Even an Italian like me knew *that* much.”

Kamijou Touma, the young man with failing marks, began to mope at their omnidirectional verbal assault.

“Anyway, there’s a special thing planted in this Edo-period map of Japan. Everyone here knows of Idol Theory, right?” Index paused. “Other than Touma, I mean.”

Regular people normally didn’t know any occult lingo, but everyone around him was treating it as obvious, common knowledge. He felt like they were leaving him alone in the dark.

“Study session time for Touma, then! Idol Theory is the fundamental theory describing how to effectively use the power of God and angels. Say you have a crucifix—a well-done one, replicating the one used to put the Son of God to death. If you applied the theory and put it onto the roof of a church, it would receive a portion of the actual crucifix’s divine power. Of course, the replica would normally store less than 0.000000000001 percent of it. Even the legendary replica of the Holy Manger stops at just a few percent. Well, even with one percent of the original’s power, it would have power rivaling the twelve apostles.”

There were countless crucifixes spread throughout the world, from the ones perched atop churches to the ones nuns wore around their necks. Apparently, even with that power spread out across all of them, the power of the original wouldn’t decline at all. Kamijou figured that it was like the relationship between the sun and solar panels.

“And this Idol Theory is a theory that says you can reverse it. In other words, not only does the real thing affect the idol—the idol also affects the real thing.”

“A theory...So they don’t know for sure?”

“There are a lot of exceptions it doesn’t cover—that’s why it’s just a theory. But that’s where getting punished for mishandling a Bible comes from. The Greeks persecuted Christians long ago, and there are plenty of stories in the Bible of Greek idols getting struck by lightning and destroyed. And long ago in Japan, there were plates called ‘fumi-e’ that had Christian symbols on them, and you were supposed to stomp on them to prove you weren’t Christian. It’s theorized that by harming such an idol, it would work in reverse, and it would cause harmful effects on the original.” Index seemed a little dissatisfied as she spoke. She probably didn’t like words like “apparently” or “hypothesis”, being a self-styled treasure trove of knowledge. “Inou Tadataka reversed this Idol Theory. If the real thing can influence the replica, then why not reverse it? He wrote in entrances and exits to teleportation points on his Great Coastal Map of Japan that weren’t originally there and, in doing so, actually *created* forty-seven ‘eddies’ on the islands of Japan.”

Kamijou desperately tried to mentally organize all this “common” information being rattled off to him.

The Japanese archipelago and the elaborate miniature map of Japan that this Inou Tadataka guy had made were linked in some way. He had scribbled in some warp points onto that map of Japan, and that led to actual warp points being created on the Japanese archipelago.

So then, whatever you happened to doodle on a map of Japan would become the truth?

“Wait. That’s absolutely nuts! What if someone erased part of the map? People and cities would just be wiped out!”

“That wouldn’t happen. Listen, in order for something to be an idol, it needs to be a proper miniature. If there is even a slight magical disturbance between it and the real thing, it loses its function as an idol. That’s why Idol Theory isn’t all-powerful. If the original ‘image’ gets messed up, the theory itself no longer applies.”

Index told him in a serious tone that there used to be a branch of magic that tried to use likenesses of the Son of God in order to manipulate the Son of God in Heaven, but that all ended in failure.

“On the other hand, it means Inou Tadataka was amazing. He added something that was clearly not right and bent the ‘golden ratio’ of his miniature by a tiny bit. I think he’s the only one who’s ever been able to do something like that in the whole history of magic. If he was a sculptor, he might have even been able to manipulate the Son of God and angels...Of course, just controlling the map of Japan is pretty shocking in its own right!”

"...Okay, so then the Amakusa can use it freely?"

"Yep. Inou Tadataka had a strong interest in foreign countries during the Edo shogunate, and there was even one time his faction tried to sell the Great Coastal Map of Japan to Philipp Franz von Siebold. He would have known about the current ban on Christianity through his Dutch studies, so it would be appropriate to say that he had unofficial contact with the Amakusa Church mainly out of academic interest."

Whatever the pesky details were, this was the conclusion: Amakusa had magic right now that would let them instantly warp to anywhere in Japan they wanted. So they wouldn't even need to break the perimeter.

Agnese had been listening to Index with a dumbstruck face.

As he continued arranging the information thus far in his head, Kamijou asked, "Then what do we do? They might have already warped, right? Since there's only a certain number of points, should we investigate them all?"

"We can't do that. Only twenty-three of the eddies from the Great Coastal Map of Japan have actually been discovered—even though when they tried to sell the map over to the black ships, the specifications said there were forty-seven of them."

More than half of the points were still a mystery. That meant they couldn't follow them or meet them where they were going.

"And in addition to this special movement method using the Great Coastal Map of Japan, the Amakusa is famous because the location of their base is unknown...That's how it should be, though, since otherwise they could have their escape routes cut off. Agnese said earlier that it was *apparently* in Kyushu, but that's not certain, either. There are countless pieces of information saying where the Amakusa's headquarters are, and it still isn't even close to being pinpointed. Either the information is false or they're using all of those places as bases. And we don't even know which of *those* it is."

Agnese paled. She grabbed Index's shoulder with both hands to support her body and shouted, "Th-then what do we do?! Wait, if you had information like that, why didn't you say anything until now?! We can't get the jump on them, and we can't pursue them to their base. If they make the jump, it's all over! If we had hurried to deal with them before that, we might have been able to do something! Why are you so relaxed about this?!"

"Because there's no need to hurry," said Index flatly, dumbfounding Agnese once again. "The Great Coastal Map of Japan was a map surveyed by using the stars in the night sky. The motion of the stars is a special quality permeating the map itself, and it has a big effect on using this method. Basically there's a time restriction. You can only use the method at certain times." She looked up into the sky, her silver hair swaying. "Right now...As far as I can tell from the stars, it's about 7:30 PM. The usage restriction will lift right after the date changes, so we still have about four and a half hours. Plus, the eddy

point they need to warp from is in a fixed location. Out of the twenty-three known eddies, there's only one within the perimeter that they can use," Index declared confidently. "Of course, we can't discard the possibility that there's another one that hasn't been discovered yet."

Whenever she turned up in this kind of situation, it always reminded Kamijou that she lived in a different world.

"So where's this point, then?"

"Touma, don't you have a blinky-blinky map? Give it to me for a minute!"

"You mean the GPS in my phone?" He handed his cell phone to her, but she scowled at it, so he decided to stand next to her and hold it sideways. She ordered him to go more to the right, a little farther down. After various other commands, she finally indicated one point with her slender, fair index finger.

"It's right there."

Part 3

"Our recon team reported that they discovered two suspicious persons near the point in question. They're likely to be Amakusa, but we're leaving them alone for the moment."

They got results not fifteen minutes after Agnese had delivered the command upon hearing Index's advice. It really gave Kamijou a sense of how different things were when you had more people. He was all over the place during Angel Fall, despite it being a chaotic situation to begin with.

"But they say they couldn't locate the main Amakusa force, the *Book of the Law*, or Orsola."

"Makes sense. Going in with dozens of people at this hour would be sure to raise eyebrows. They're still *open for business* over there, after all."

Kamijou didn't know exactly when the stores would close up, but it still wasn't even eight yet.

If the Amakusa members planned to flee from here using the tricks in Inou Tadataka's map, then they would need to use a movement point called an "eddy." He and the others were planning to crush Amakusa when they got to it and rescue the *Book of the Law* and Orsola.

“It’s possible there are other points we don’t know about—and possible that they won’t use the special movement method. Since we can’t see the main force anywhere, it will be hard to split up all our personnel among the designated regions. Unless we funnel a lot of power into both the upkeep of our perimeter and searching those areas, their chances to escape will rise, so. It’s just that it would still be real risky...”

Agnese sounded worried, but Index didn’t let it get to her. “I think that’s normal. It isn’t like there’s any definite evidence that what I’m saying is true.”

Agnese continued. “Thus, we have seventy-four people to use, including myself. We’re reorganizing our weapons and spiritual items now, but we cannot promise victory should we encounter the Amakusa’s main force. I’m sorry, but I’ll need to have you protect your own hides.”

Until now, Amakusa had fought on equal terms with less than fifty people against the Roman Catholic Church, which boasted more than two hundred fifty. Her remarks were understandable.

Stiyl lit a new cigarette. “We don’t mind. I can’t get in contact with those Knight idiots who promised to send us support anyway, and we can’t have ourselves being luggage, either. How long will the reorganization take before you can move out?”

“Selecting weapons and armor...And including the application of holy water and each individual reading scripture aloud to gain protection...” Agnese thought for a moment. “Three hours, give or take...At the latest, we’ll be done by eleven.”

“And when we include transit time, we’ll need to settle things in a little over half an hour. Well, it’s fine—even if we were really early, we’d just be waiting in vain if the Amakusa main force didn’t come to the point in question anyway.”

With this and that, it was decided that mobilization would be at 11 PM.

Agnese clapped her hands together, fired off an order in a foreign language, and the sisters dressed in black all began moving at once. The seventy-four of them immediately formed two-to four-person teams and hastened their respective preparations.

For Kamijou, who had grown accustomed to seeing individualistic—or to put it more negatively, self-centered—magicians like Stiyl, Tsuchimikado, and Kanzaki, the perfect order with which this group operated was a little surprising.

The plan was that Agnese and the others would split into teams to rescue the *Book of the Law* and Orsola and prepare for combat individually. Those who were finished would switch out and grab a meal and a nap. But how could they catch any shut-eye just hours before a battle?

He was dubious, but according to Agnese, you wouldn’t sleep too soundly in a bed if the battle dragged on. It seemed to be common sense for them that if they had any time at

all, they should sleep in short bursts—even for just ten or twenty minutes—and recover their stamina. He figured the women in this group must be used to fighting under such conditions.

Of course, he, Index, and Stiyl didn't need to prepare anything anyway, so they ended up getting food right away and taking a nap. He wondered if maybe that was Agnese being considerate toward her guests. And incidentally, their meal and rest would both be outdoors.

Why was he camping out in the middle of Japan's capital, again? He couldn't help but find this odd, but then he considered it calmly—the sight of seventy-strong people dressed in strange clothing assembling at a restaurant or hotel and preparing for battle would be surreal, and akin to camping out anyway.

(But if we're going to be starting at eleven...Am I going to make it to school tomorrow? Ah! Wait a sec, isn't the deadline for avoiding the summer homework penalty coming up?)

Panicked, he turned his thoughts back to Academy City, but there was nothing he could do about it.

Due to various circumstances, he never finished his homework from summer break. Komoe-sensei had given him a replacement assignment because of that (she had created handouts for him alone). The deadline, if he recalled correctly, was tomorrow...

(Ahhhhh!)

He blanched. He thought he'd have finished it for *sure*. The hard-working Kamijou Touma had been desperately racking his brains and desperately evading Index's desire to play and the cat's desire for snacks all day. In all honesty, there was a part he would never have been able to do on his own. But after Misaka Mikoto taught him the trick to solving those problems yesterday (she stuck with him for hours for some reason, despite getting angry at him constantly), he had sped up his pace, and he had just begun to catch a glimpse of a ray of hope that he'd finish within the day.

(Crap, crap, she'll be so mad! What do I do, ahh...Komoe-sensei will definitely get mad that Mikoto helped me, no doubt. Ahh...I haven't said this in a while. One, two—such misfortune!)

He began to tremble a little. He quietly looked up at the night sky—and decided to believe the shining, transparent drops coming from his eyelids were sweat.

His shoulders drooped. He trudged over to the camp in the corner and got himself some soup and bread that seemed Italian but he didn't really know the names. As he munched on it, he took a quick look at his surroundings. There were a number of dome-shaped tents all over the Hakumeiza parking lot. The parking lot was definitely not big enough to cover everyone, but some could sleep inside the building. Besides, more than half of

the Roman Catholic people here were urgently making preparations and didn't seem to have time to catch a nap anyway.

It all made Kamijou hesitant to go to sleep by himself without a care in the world, but Stiyl had said bored people wandering around would be much more of a nuisance.

(No one's gonna call the police on all these people camping out in an abandoned building, are they? Or did they do that magic to keep people away so that wouldn't happen?)

Kamijou thought as he entered a tent in the campground and wrapped himself up in a blanket.

Stiyl was already lying down next to him, and Index was apparently in the next tent over. The magician had wanted to be in the same tent so he could protect her, but that opinion didn't seem to go over well. "If only Kanzaki were here—she's a girl...," he had muttered, grinding his teeth, while sticking rune cards all over the tent she was in. Kamijou looked at them. It seemed like Innocentius's power level varied based on how many cards Stiyl used, and the man had been lamenting how limited he was with such a small tent.

Kamijou lay in the tent for a little while, but he just couldn't seem to sleep. It wasn't that he didn't feel tired or that he was experiencing pre-battle excitement—he just felt awkward resting by himself when so many other people were working outside. And when he envisioned them in his mind's eye, he couldn't help but think of Orsola, dressed in the same habit.

"...I'm going to go help with something."

Squirming, he crawled out from underneath his blanket.

Stiyl seemed annoyed. "I won't stop you, but please try not to break any of their spiritual items with that strange right hand...And if you do, you're on your own. The Anglican Church will have nothing to do with it."

Spurred on by the extremely unpleasant advice, Kamijou left the tent.

The night was sweltering. It was hot and humid outside, too. He saw a girl with a big bundle of silver candles in her hands, a sister carrying a good number of old Bibles, a lady hoisting a huge wooden wheel you might see on a horse-drawn carriage—all going to and fro in the crowd, busy as bees. He didn't know how to use any of that stuff.

(All right. I wonder if there's something I can help with...Wait, huh?)

He noticed something and stopped. Index's tent, the one right next to his, which was plastered with cards—the zipper for the entrance was open. It didn't look like there was anyone inside.

(Where did she get off to—Wait, whoa?!)

As he was looking over there and walking, he suddenly noticed that he had lost all sensation underfoot. He had unwittingly stepped into the equilateral triangular hole the Amakusa had opened in the ground.

(Eek, I'm falling!!)

Just before his body slipped into the sewer without a sound, as he flailed about in midair, a sister in black hurriedly grabbed his hand. She pulled him up, then gave him an angry lecture in some foreign language. He didn't really understand what she was saying.

(Aw, jeez, am I being a huge bother right now or what?)

A heavy, dark aura coiled itself around the dejected Kamijou as he observed the triangular hole he was about to fall into.

The Amakusa used the sewers as a route to directly attack the surface from underground. Until now, he had considered this place to be relatively safe to wander about, since it was essentially the Roman Catholic Church's base. Maybe, though, the line was a lot thinner than he thought. It was the command center of the Amakusa's pursuers. He realized they must be concerned about the fleeing Amakusa coming to this base and wrecking it, since it would make it easier for them to run away.

(Well, I doubt pulling an intricate surprise attack on an amateur like me would mean much. If there was an important point somewhere here, like an HQ, that could be in danger, though.)

That said, he couldn't tell the difference between the tents that were important and the ones that weren't. For the time being, he saw a tent that was a size bigger than the others and got the detached impression that they'd probably go for something like that. But then...

All of a sudden, a loud crashing sound came from the large tent.

A girl's shriek followed in its wake.

"...?!" Kamijou's mouth dried. His vague idea from a few seconds ago shot back across his mind.

The Amakusa were able to directly attack the surface from underground.

And they would probably go after tents important to Agnese and the others.

(But that means...really? Are you serious...?)

"Damn it!"

The silver lining was that the tent was quite close to Kamijou. He tightened his right fist hard as a boulder and dashed for it. There were many sisters nearby, but they were standing there at a loss at the sudden situation. Kamijou ran through them to the entrance of the big tent and pulled the zipper on it down in one motion.

“Amakusa!!”

At the same time he shouted, there was something heavy in the opened entrance—and slammed right into Kamijou’s gut. It was heavy and warm, and he thought he could feel watery moisture.

(Gah...?!)

Kamijou got goose bumps everywhere at the strange sensation. He was about to swing his fist down when...

...He realized that the person with her arms around his stomach was a completely naked Agnese Sanctis.

“.....Huh?”

Kamijou heard the sound of a huge bell ringing in his head as his mind went completely blank.

The stark-naked Agnese’s hair was wet with water, and there was moisture on her skin, too. Her soft skin was tinged faintly in red, with white vapor rising from it. But his embracer was trembling all over, her eyes were firmly shut with her face buried in his stomach, and she was muttering things in another language—all these amounted to the fact that something was wrong.

He didn’t understand what Agnese was saying, but as she clung to him, she pointed at something. He looked that way.

There was a small slug stuck to the corner of the big tent.

As she pointed, she said something in a foreign language.

“W-wait, Agnese. Just get off and put on some clothes. And I only understand Japanese!” Kamijou shouted, his face bright red.

Her trembling stopped immediately.

With much trepidation, she looked up.

Her eyes locked with Kamijou Touma.

In the next moment...

Agnese passed out and fell straight backward.

(Ugeh?!)

The ground was made of rough asphalt. He hurried to gather her up right before she collapsed onto it. A strangely warm sensation came through his shirt, sending all the nerves in Kamijou's body into a frenzy. Agnese was more slender than Index overall, so she had a firmer feel—but that, in contrast, only seemed to emphasize her softness on a part-by-part basis.

(Uh...?!)

Then, when Kamijou directed his gaze straight up to get his eyes off of Agnese, now snug in his arms, he saw something else and quaked again.

There was a big metal basin in the middle of the tent. And there was a metal bucket hanging from the tent's ceiling, right above the basin. There was something like a watering can spout in the bottom of the bucket and a faucet attached to it. It looked like a simple shower, where you put hot water into the bucket and turned the faucet in order to get it to come out. And in reality, water *was* flowing from it at the moment.

And in the middle of the basin area...At the very center of the tent, still being blessed with a rain of hot water...

"...Touma?"

...Was a nun with silvery hair and green eyes, speaking in a very low voice. She wasn't wearing anything, of course. Her slim chest, to which her hair soaked in hot water was sticking...Her belly button, to which just a few water droplets were gathered...He could see everything. She had pale skin to begin with, which ended up emphasizing the redness coming from her body warmth even further.

"N-no, please, wait, Kamijou-san totally thought the Amakusa had attacked and he was worried so he ran over here so he hopes you take that into account, too, that would be nice and..."

"Ooh..."

"??? Ooh?"

Kamijou had been watching Index's each and every movement with fearful eyes, but...

"...nn, hic. Waah..."

(Sh-she's cryiiiinnngg?!)

Kamijou Touma's body gave a strange reaction to the unexpected development. Meanwhile, big teardrops fell from Index's eyes, and she was rubbing them with her hands.

Suddenly, he noticed excessively cold stares collected on him from nearby.

More than one hundred nuns had directly labeled him as a man who makes completely naked young girls cry (not to mention their similarly naked, unconscious leader beside him). The color drained from his face.

"Huh, wait, c-calm down, please, Index-san! This isn't your personality! Don't you usually do something more like this? See, Kamijou-san's head is right here! Just chomp it down as hard as you can already!! Wait, what? Stop, stop! Why do you look so unusually serious?! Th-that was just a figure of speech what are you doing with that saw you could slice up a huge cow with that thing wait a minute sto—Gyaaahhhh?!"

♦

"Didn't I tell you not to make a nuisance of yourself? Hm? What are you clutching your head and crying for?" Stiyl, lying down, tiredly questioned the worn-out Kamijou upon seeing him return to their tent. The tent's opening had been shut—he may have known something had happened, but he didn't seem to realize it had to do with Index. If he found out, the crazy priest would end up chasing him all over the camp with a flaming sword in his hands.

He would rather avoid any further trouble—after all, Agnese had just plainly condemned him, saying, "...I need to look over our plans. Please leave me alone." So he crawled under his own blanket, still rubbing his stinging head. The magician had said earlier that using even five or ten minutes of free time to get in a bit of sleep and rest your body was basic battlefield knowledge, but he didn't think he'd be able to sleep until the pain in his head went away.

"Hey, Stiyl?"

"What is it? I am very irritated right now, so if possible, I would like you to leave this for later."

"I want to ask something."

"Everyone here has such bad crisis management. So what if it's the *Book of the Law*, anyway? They're running around like chickens with their fool heads cut off for *one* grimoire! Do they have any idea how many magicians are after the girl controlling 103,000 of them—?"

"Is there a girl you like?"

“Bwah?!” Stiyl’s breath caught in his throat and he broke out into a full-body shiver.

Kamijou thought this was something you were *supposed* to ask at a sleepover. It seemed *that* was a Japanese-specific custom, however.

“I respect women like Elizabeth I, and St. Martha is a good example of the type I prefer. The anecdote where she exterminates an evil dragon using only prayers of love and charity mesmerizes me. Any other questions?”

“The Amakusa-style Christian Church...That’s where Kanzaki used to be, isn’t it?”

“...”

Stiyl narrowed his eyes in thought and fell silent for a bit. He tried to take out a cigarette, but he must have figured that smoking in bed was bad, because his hands stopped halfway there.

“Who did you hear that from? Kanzaki wouldn’t have gone into her personal history very easily. Was it Tsuchimikado?”

“Yeah. He told me while you were busy being that guy at the beach.” Stiyl’s face basically became a question mark, but Kamijou left that aside and continued. “But, well...Aren’t they Kanzaki’s friends?” He paused, perplexed. “...Are we still doing this? Like the time with Misawa Cram School?”

There was one other time when Kamijou and Stiyl had formed a united front in the past.

That battle couldn’t be called pretty even in flattery. A lot of people had been hurt, and some had even died. He got the picture—that’s what clashes between magicians, or between groups or organizations of them, meant. Their professional world didn’t permit weakness, and that was what created specialists like Index and Stiyl.

But...

As a professional who knew how strict it was, wouldn’t he be extremely hesitant about this?

“We are.” However, Stiyl Magnus gave a prompt decision, without even a second of hesitation. “Of course we are. Whether it’s obeying orders from above—or even if they’re trying to stop me, I already decided I’d do anything to protect her. I’ll kill anyone I need to. I’ll burn them alive. I’ll burn even their corpses to nothing. Whether it’s while she’s watching or while she isn’t.” His own words seemed to pain him. “Don’t get me wrong, Kamijou Touma. Everything I’m doing is for that girl. And if you did something to the contrary, I would turn your bones into ash at this very moment.”

“...”

Kamijou gulped.

When all was said and done, that was the whole reason for the things this man, Stiyl Magnus, did. The fact that he was from the Anglican Church, the fact that he gained power to fight as a magician, the fact that he came on orders to save the *Book of the Law* and Orsola—anything and everything.

"I made an oath long ago—Relax, and go to sleep. Even if you forget everything, I won't forget a thing. I will live and die for your sake."

His conclusion was enough to make him shudder.

At the same time, a deep sense of human kindness was in his voice.

Kamijou carefully chose his next words—he thought it would be rude if he didn't.

"But then why did you get Index involved in something like this?"

"I'm not the one who planned this—if I had the choice, she wouldn't be anywhere near this place," answered Stiyl smoothly. "But I must not settle things on my own. They would judge her worthless then. If I cannot display value in using Index to my superiors, they might end up sending her back to London. Tearing her away from her life in Academy City would be the most unbearable thing that could happen to her right now."

His voice was casual. Given that Stiyl Magnus was her Anglican colleague, Kamijou would think he'd be happier if she came back—but Stiyl Magnus spoke in a casual voice.

"Go to sleep. We only have two hours until the assault. We'll start to have nightmares if we talk for much longer."

Leaving it at that, the runic magician shut his mouth and his eyes.

(How am I supposed to get any sleep when people could start killing one another in a few hours?)

Kamijou wondered that, but after wrapping himself in a blanket and closing his eyes, drowsiness must have overtaken his body at some point. In other words, he was asleep before he knew it. Maybe he was a lot more tired from the Daihaseisai preparations than he'd thought.

♦

(Mm...huh...?)

Kamijou then opened his eyes for a simple reason—because he felt a weight pressing down on him.

He perceived the weight of a grown person, saw some kind of swell in his blanket, and felt the soft, warm sensation of human skin.

He began to hear a soft sleeper's breathing from inside the blanket.

(Hey, wait. Crap, could this be...?! Damn, I just remembered that you can't lock tents!)

Normally, Kamijou spent his nights locked in his bathroom, sleeping in his drained bathtub. For a simple reason, too—to stop Index from climbing into his sleeping space no matter what. He was always so thankful he had a long bathtub he could stretch his legs out in.

Not only was the crime of invading someone's sleeping space already having a terrible effect on the healthy young man, but Stiyl was also sleeping next to him right now (and he had just said some serious stuff about oaths before going to sleep). Depending on how this turned out, he could be quite literally beheaded for his crimes.

And atop Kamijou's body as it exuded a cold sweat, a fairly young girl's body squirmed about. He came in contact with all kinds of defenseless parts of her—he thought his heart would stop.

"(...Wh-whoa?! Wait, wait a minute, Index! Hey, sleeping next to me would be one thing, but taking up a position right on top of me—isn't that going way too far?!)" protested Kamijou hurriedly in a low voice (though he thought he was practically yelling).

"Mm...What is it, Touma...?"

Then he heard a familiar voice from the entrance to the tent.

He looked to see Index, her eyes half-closed in sleepiness, opening the zipper on the tent and about to creep into his blanket.

(Huh?)

Kamijou looked at her, aghast.

"Mgh.....Papa...Lo non posso mangiare alcuno più qualsiasi più lungo....."

The one who came out of the blanket was Agnese Sanctis.

She was probably half-asleep and so didn't realize, but there were less than five centimeters between their lips.

Agnese, who was still sleeping soundly, did not realize that she was less than five centimeters away from Kamijou's lips.

(What?! Are you serious?! She has this sleepwalking-into-other-people's-futons habit, too?! Wait, didn't she just get done telling me at the shower to go away?! Eeeek!)

He averted his face from the small lips verging on touching him, then hastily crawled out from under Agnese. As he rolled, he pulled the blanket off of her.

"Wha?!"

Kamijou was dumbfounded.

From out of the blanket appeared Agnese, wearing nothing but a white lace bra and panties with rope sides that were tied in bowknots.

And as if she normally did so before sleeping, her habit was neatly folded up in a corner of the tent.

Index, in a complete daze, looked at them both and spoke.

"...Papa?"

"Waaait! Index, I don't know what's going on, either! I absolutely did *not* force a young girl to call me such a particular name! I do *not* have a habit of wallowing in self-satisfaction like this!!" Kamijou attempted a vindication, trembling in fear from having gotten his head bitten in regards to Agnese just a little while ago.

Index observed his expression of fear.

"Ah-ha...Maybe this...is a dream?"

"Huh?"

"Yeah, even Touma would never be this unfaithful. So this is a dream." She yawned.

"Y-yeah, that's it! This is a dream! You're silly—Kamijou Touma is a woman-discarding bad-luck flag master who always runs away. He would never do something this shameless, would he?!"

He had been attempting to lead the sleepyhead Index on as if through hypnotism, but...

"Mmh. Okay, if this is a dream, then it's okay. I can bite Touma as much as I want and it's okay. Since this is a dream. And I can vent all my complaints from today on him and it's okay. Mmh."

"Huh? Ah, what?! W-wait, Index!! No, this is all definitely re—?!"

Kamijou frantically tried to correct himself, but he couldn't stop her—she bit down onto his head with all her might. At the healthy male high school student's shriek—no,

scream—Agnese, still half-asleep in her underwear right next to him, jerked awake and sat up. Incidentally, when Stiyl Magnus, who had been sleeping in the same tent, had given one look to all the commotion, he had rolled over to face away from them and gone back to sleep.

Part 4

It was 11 PM.

The Amakusa vicar, Tatemiya Saiji, and his forty-seven subordinates assembled at the specified eddy point for the special movement method, Miniature Pilgrimage.

It was no mystical forest or mountain, however. It was in the corner of a huge theme park specializing in confectionery, above which hung a signboard reading PARALLEL SWEETS PARK.

The result of a collaborative effort by four major confectionery companies, the power plant–sized site played host to seventy-five sweets shops representing thirty-eight countries from around the world. Several donut-shaped waterways overlapping one another like the Olympic rings formed the basis of its structure. The confectionery booths, which were small as food carts but clearly manned by skillful folk, lined the outer edge of each circular waterway. The spaces inside the waterways were open plazas and spaces for manufacturer exhibitions and events. At the moment, they appeared to be running a campaign involving chilled sweets and sherbets—perfect to battle the lingering heat of summer.

The eddy positions established by Inou Tadataka remained fixed, but the development situation of the town changed on a daily basis. This place was still relatively usable. On some eddies, however, there were apartment rooms or bank vaults constructed on them, making this method of movement completely unusable.

The members of the Amakusa, already having infiltrated Parallel Sweets Park, immediately got to work preparing for the Miniature Pilgrimage.

The method could only be used starting at midnight, but it was an established tactic to prepare beforehand. They would only have five minutes to actually utilize it, after all. Beginning the preparations when that window opened wouldn't give them enough time. And there was no rule saying they had to finish preparing at midnight exactly, either. They could finish up beforehand, then just flip the switch at midnight to activate it.

And though they were preparing magic, they weren't drawing suspicious magic circles or reciting spells or anything.

Aside from sneaking into a theme park after closing, the young adults weren't behaving particularly strangely. A group of four or five of them was having a chat. Some were opening up wrapped hamburgers or bags of potato chips and eating them. A few were pointing at the park map directions and arguing about them. Some were standing around and flipping through guidebooks. All of them were only doing very normal things.

Even their clothing looked quite a bit more natural than Index's or Stiyl's. One girl was wearing a white camisole and denim shorts. One boy was wearing layered shirts and big, baggy black pants. One woman had taken off her suit jacket and had it hanging on her arms. If there was anything a little weird, it was that ten of them, at most, were carrying things like sports bags, cases for instruments and surfboards, and canvas cases—as transport for weapons.

But those who were knowledgeable would understand.

Their clothing and casual actions all, without omission, held calculated, magical meaning.

The gender distribution. Their age variations. The combinations of clothing colors. The act of the four or five of them forming a circle. The details of their casual chat. The religious rites of eating. The ingredients and color of the hamburger and the ritualistic meaning of eating meat. The number of bites. The timing of taking drinks. The directions the men and women were walking. The positions they stopped at. The way they read their books. The total number of characters on each page.

Every one of these aspects was disassembled into "characters" and "symbols" as the wriggling flow of people would form a single spell or magic circle. They picked up the few remaining religious practices in everyday life and reassembled them. The Amakusa's techniques wouldn't leave a single trace of magic having been used. They had inherited all their ancestors' history—of those who needed to always be on the run from the shogunate's cruel oppression.

(Now then.)

Tatemiya Saiji, standing on his own, scythed his own sword horizontally.

The metallic streetlight raining light below was sliced in half, and it fell to the ground.

"(We'll show you, Kanzaki Kaori—our priestess. We'll show you what the diversified religious fusion of Christianity, the Amakusa-style Christian Church, has become!)"

Tatemiya spoke quietly to himself, tilting his head up to see the night sky.

Part 5

Historic ruins, under the veil of a dark night.

That's what Kamijou thought of Parallel Sweets Park, where the special movement method would be carried out, when he saw it from far away. The man-made amusement center about two hundred meters in front of him was devoid of light. The buildings, normally adorned with the myriad of vivid colors befitting a theme park, were now smothered in blackness. All of the facilities had been designed for fun and entertainment, of course, but it only made it feel even more out of place. An awful, damp breeze began to wipe the sweat on his cheek.

He looked away from Parallel Sweets Park. Dozens of sisters all clad in black had assembled in the big department store parking lot; that was a bizarre sight on its own.

His eyes casually met with Index's. She was writing something on her palm with her index finger—some kind of mental preparation, he guessed. She still didn't seem to want to get him involved in a clash between magicians, and she looked more on edge than she had earlier this evening. Maybe her tension was due to the elevated danger; there were significantly fewer Roman Catholic personnel present now than before.

On the other hand, Stiyl, standing a few steps behind her, was smoking a cigarette like he always did. But he would have been coming up with all kinds of plans to protect her.

Agnese's platform sandals galloped over to Kamijou and the others.

As one would expect given her age, she was pretty depressed before, during the shower thing and the half-asleep crawling-into-his-blanket thing. Now, though, he couldn't see any of that on her face. She seemed to be the type who could forget about personal feelings for her job; he didn't see any of the nervous wobbling from when they first met, either.

"We've located the Amakusa's main force in Parallel Sweets Park as we predicted. But we can't get a read on the *Book of the Law* or Orsola. I don't believe this to be the case, but this *could* all be a diversion. Therefore, we haven't loosened the perimeter our other units in the area are deployed in. Only those who are here will be doing combat." Agnese spoke as if this was already decided, and she was just making sure they knew.

Kamijou mulled over what she said for a moment. "Kinda sucks that we don't know *who* in the Amakusa has the *Book of the Law*. Or whether Orsola's even in the park. Can we still save her? If it takes too long to find her, they could run away with her or take her hostage."

(Actually, it would make more sense to use a hostage, since they're at a disadvantage, wouldn't it?)

He recalled Orsola's face. Ignorant of the ways of the world and ignoring the words of others—a girl he was pretty sure would wander off if you took your eyes off her for a second. He didn't want to see blades or guns to her throat or villains using her as a shield.

But Agnese wasn't about to spend time worrying. "If they escape Parallel Sweets Park, then that's what our perimeter's for. As for the hostage bit...meh, I don't think they'd use her as a shield."

Kamijou cocked his head to the side in confusion.

"The Amakusa's number-one objective is to get Orsola to tell them how to decode the *Book of the Law*, right? If the worst happened and she died while they were using her as a shield, their whole plan would fall apart. If they're this attached to the book, then Orsola will be safe."

Stiyl spoke up, his cigarette moving around as he did so. "The Amakusa's goal is probably to use the *Book of the Law* to fill the hole in their strength left by Kanzaki. The fact they're being so stubborn here means they're *that* desperate. If they fail to get their hands on the *Book of the Law*, it's all over for them. So they should be treating Orsola like an ice sculpture."

"...Then again, that means we'll need to find Orsola before the Amakusa turns to self-abandonment," said Kamijou, feeling the scales tipped in an odd direction. If they drove the Amakusa's backs against the wall before they found Orsola, they could self-destruct along with her. But if the Roman Catholic Church went easy on them, they wouldn't have the leeway to search for Orsola; given the difference in their forces, there wasn't much room to hold back.

Agnese, too, seemed to understand how difficult it would be to show mercy. "So I want to split our forces. Eighty percent of the Roman Catholic Church personnel will be the main force and act as a decoy, smashing into the Amakusa from the front. Meanwhile, you three will do a search of Parallel Sweets Park as a commando unit. If you locate the *Book of the Law* and Orsola, please secure them, got it?" She clapped one of her platform sandals on the ground. "If you can't find her before the special movement method expires at 12:05, then we'll have to treat her as not having been here. If that happens, please get yourselves out of Parallel Sweets Park. We'll do a thorough investigation of the park ourselves after neutralizing the Amakusa."

If they didn't find Orsola before the time limit, and she also ended up being inside the park, that in itself would end up being dangerous for her. One had only to look at Parallel Sweets Park to realize it wasn't very good for a manhunt. After all, from what Agnese had said, there were seventy-five stalls sitting in the park.

Kamijou gulped audibly, and Index opened her mouth to speak. “There’s also the eddy itself. If we don’t destroy that, they might be able to run away with Orsola. Touma could easily get rid of it, but we’d need to wait until it opened at midnight in that case. To stop them before that, we could just break the physical items they used to set this up—but the Amakusa would have camouflaged everything. Finding all that stuff would be hard.”

“Searching for the book and Orsola, *and* destroying the point...Looks like our schedule’s going to get a little busy,” remarked Stiyl, spitting out his cigarette and crushing it underfoot.

Agnese, having determined that they were ready, raised a hand. All the nuns behind her—seventy strong—hoisted their weapons in the same way, sending the ring of cold steel through the night.

Their weapons weren’t all the same. There were obvious ones like swords or spears in the crowd, then there were those that Kamijou supposed *could* be used, like silver staffs and giant crosses. And then there were some crazy things: a giant cogwheel as tall as him and a pine torch. He couldn’t even take a stab at what they were for. Agnese herself had been given a silver staff by one of the sisters.

“...This can’t be forgiven,” she said odiously into the darkness, resting her staff against her shoulder. “When Christianity first spread, it was with the goal of saving everyone. And they’re using that power for *this*? They wield their violence for something so stupid, and they’re forcing us to use even more stupid violence against them. Why can’t they realize such a simple chain of events?”

“...”

The answer to that was simple—all you had to do was take a step back and think about it—but Kamijou felt like it was a very difficult problem for the people concerned. Of course, he agreed with her opinion as much as the next guy.

“Well, maybe this isn’t the right way of putting it...But it’s not only the Amakusa—this is why I don’t like magicians. It’s people like this. Especially those modern western magician societies that popped up at the start of the twentieth century. They all use Christian techniques that are underhanded or split hairs with the ideology. I mean, they even typically use the names of the archangels for their magic circles, like the Likeness of God, Michael, and the Power of God, Gabriel. Even besides the twentieth century, like during the witch-hunting days, alchemists contracted to royalty would always make these declarations. ‘This is a secret technique in Christianity, so it isn’t actually witchcraft. I am no more than another one of God’s faithful sheep,’ they said.” Agnese stomped her feet, which made a clopping noise. “They meticulously comb through the Bible from start to finish, scrutinizing every single word from the mouth of God. They plumb it for contradictions and holes while sipping their sweet honey. Their black magic goes against the will of God. That is the identity of our true enemies—not the terrible ones without, but the abominable ones within. magicians are like the politicians who bring countries to ruin by exploiting loopholes in the law. People like us obey the rules

and stand in a single-file line to receive our daily bread—and they cut in front of us in line, acting all innocent and stuff. That's why all this weird trouble keeps happening. I would not tell them not to partake of their bread—I'd tell 'em to get to the back of the line like they're supposed to, you know?"

Kamijou heard all this and was understandably a little dubious of what sounded like a policy of Christian supremacy. But the important part was that she couldn't forgive the Amakusa for breaking the rules when everyone else was obeying them (or so Agnese believed). As a side note, Stiyl Magnus, a magician by trade, was smirking and ignoring Agnese's indignation; Index looked slightly worried.

(Well, Necessarius is full of magicians, so they probably feel offended, huh? But still, Agnese...Girls can really change their expressions a lot. She was all nervous and wobbling around before. What strange creatures.)

When he glanced around him to change the subject, he only saw Roman Catholic sisters in every direction.

"Still, though. For someone saying all those modest things about not being able to spare all her forces, you got this many people to gather up with a single word," he remarked in slightly shocked admiration.

Agnese smiled. "It is our privilege to outnumber all. We have comrades in 110 countries around the world, you know. Even in Japan there are plenty of churches. In fact, a new house of the lord is being constructed as we speak—the Church of Orsola. I think it was somewhere around here, actually. Right nearby. I think they were bragging that when it was finished, it would be the largest church in Japan. It was supposedly as big as a baseball stadium." Agnese's soles made more soft clopping noises.

"Orsola?"

"Yes. She has quite a record, you know. She spread the teachings of God to three heretic nations, earning her the special privilege to have a church built in her name. She was very good at speaking, wasn't she?"

Now that she mentioned it, Kamijou figured she might have been right. It was just that all the Japanese-speaking foreigners coming out of the woodwork tonight lessened that sense for him. He was grateful for it, of course—Japanese was the only language he could speak.

"Once the church is finished, we'll send you some invitations. But before that, we should settle the issue at hand. Let's pray for a splendid conclusion with a good aftertaste."

Agnese gave an intrepid grin, hoisted her heavy-looking silver staff on her shoulders, and clapped the heels of her feet twice on the ground. The thirty-centimeter-high platforms slid off and they turned into normal sandals. It seemed that they were made to come on and off at will, just like the fasteners on their habits.

"...Umm. I understand it's easier to move around like that. But why don't you keep those off normally?"

"Shut up. It's called fashion. I'm very particular about it."

Part 6

11:27 PM.

Kamijou, Index, and Stiyl arrived at the chain-link fence near Parallel Sweets Park's employee entrance.

Though they had yet to set foot on the battlefield, Kamijou could feel electricity tingling his skin. Someone could have been watching them from the vast expanse of darkness beyond this fence, and they wouldn't know. Their enemies probably had to limit their hiding places to a single part of the park—but the whole thing was already looking like a giant enemy breadbasket.

(And she's in the middle of it...)

How hard must it have been for Orsola to be left behind, alone? He considered what he'd feel like if dozens of villains with swords and spears were surrounding him.

(Dammit. If I knew this was gonna happen, I would have just forced Orsola into Academy City in the first place.)

"Hey, Stiyl."

"What?"

"Do you think we can really do everything we need to before time runs out? We have to destroy the point, search for the book, and rescue Orsola—all of those things."

Stiyl remained silent for a moment at his question. Index, too, looked between them nervously.

After a pause, the magician answered. "Honestly, it's going to be tough. We don't even know where in the park the *Book of the Law* or Orsola is. Plus, there's actually one piece of information I didn't tell the Roman Catholic Church."

Kamijou tilted his head in confusion.

“Right before this incident occurred, Kanzaki Kaori, who should have been in England, disappeared. She’s probably acting on behalf of her former subor—Her friends. If we try to deal major damage to the Amakusa, the Saint might attack.”

Kamijou was taken by such surprise and nervousness that he thought his mouth would dry up like a desert.

Kanzaki Kaori was such a strong magician that she could suppress a real angel, as she had during the Angel Fall incident. He hadn’t personally seen her in battle, but he found it easy to imagine how dangerous she would be as their enemy.

And even *he* understood clearly that Stiyl’s prediction could very probably end up as reality.

“So don’t think about accomplishing all our jobs. The plan was bound to fail in the first place—and we’ve got enough danger on our plate right now. The worst thing that could happen is them deciphering the *Book of the Law*, so try to prevent that.”

“Well, then...” Kamijou looked between Stiyl and Index before continuing. “Then can we make Orsola our top priority?”

“I don’t care one way or the other. The book is a complete waste without the decoder. This girl here has all the knowledge of the book itself in her head, so we’re not interested in the original copy, either. And the Roman Catholic Church is the one that owns it, so even if it’s lost, it’s no skin off the Anglican Church’s back.”

“I think it’s a good idea, too. And if we told you no, you’d just go charging in there anyway! We’re already short on people, so we all need to stay together.”

Both Index and Stiyl, the Anglican magician, answered without much worry.

They probably had their own issues as professionals, but they still accepted the opinion of an entirely ignorant amateur.

“All right. Thanks!”

They both made rather bewildered faces. Index exaggerated her facial expressions from the start, so that was normal—but Stiyl, depending on your point of view, almost looked comical.

He clicked his tongue. “Don’t go cramping my style before we go charging in. The diversion starts at eleven thirty. We’ll be infiltrating when that happens, so we should—”

“Touma, don’t relax once we’re inside, okay? Make sure you hide behind me and listen to what I tell you to do, or you’ll be in danger.”

“Hah? What are you saying, you silly sister? When it comes to magicians, my right hand is like an iron wall. You should be the one hiding behind *me* and taking *my* advice.”

“...”

Kamijou and Index hushed up at their difference in opinion.

“—We should be going in soon, so I’d appreciate it if you focused on this. Seriously,” said Stiyl calmly, feeling excluded from the conversation. And right that moment...

...There came an explosion from the distant admission entrance.

“...Hey. Is that really the diversion?” murmured Kamijou, a little dazed at the sight of the giant, burning, roaring pillar of flame.

“It means they’ll lose unless they use things like that, Touma. Don’t let down your guard!” said Index.

“And it’s not causing an issue. They’re combining magic to keep people away and to interrupt. But I don’t feel the mannerisms of the Roman Catholic Church in the technique—I don’t feel that unique accent...It must have been the Amakusa. Rather annoying that they have techniques this powerful.”

Either way, the time had come.

Index pressed herself against the chain-link fence and focused on something past it. After confirming there were no magical traps set up, the three of them jumped the fence and snuck into the unlit park.

The park lights were off, making it a dark bubble within a bustling city. Kamijou even felt like the starlight here was stronger than it usually was. They had entered from outside the actual viewing course. Once they passed between a gelato stand and an almond jelly stand, neither of which was much bigger than a mobile home, they entered the course.

It was a giant circular path. Right in the middle, there was a waterway—actually, more like a moat—and the surface of the water was about three meters under the walkway. He couldn’t tell how deep it went. There were tons of little stands along the outer edge of the course, on the outer circumference. All they had were counters like the ones on food carts—they weren’t made so that people could eat inside them. The space on the inside part of the waterway had been made into a plaza. There were many tables and chairs there, so that must have been where people took their treats.

According to Agnese, there was more than one ring—there were several adjacent ones, forming a shape similar to the Olympic rings.

"..."

It would have been a whale of a time had they come in the afternoon, but Kamijou knew they were in a different world right now. Without any lights, all the tiny stalls with their rustic, closed shutters easily felt like they were refusing them. The place felt eerie, like a person's face lit up by a flashlight from below. Even the ravenous Index, normally the merriest of them all, was just looking into the darkness in tension.

"Touma, Touma. We don't have time. If we're gonna look for Orsola, we have to start."

"Right—we only have thirty minutes. We could also set up an ambush if we found the eddy, but given the situation I'd say the odds of that are pretty low," said Stiyl, who, unusually, wasn't smoking so that he could blend into the night.

They started to hear the sounds of angry roaring, shouting, things breaking, and explosions. It seemed the Roman Catholic Church and the Amakusa had clashed in earnest.

"R-right. Got it."

The moment the words left his mouth, they heard a metallic noise.

Kamijou inadvertently turned his head upward toward the source of the noise, when...

...From the roof of the gelato specialty shop came four boys and girls leaping through the air.

All of them were gripping western-style swords.

"?!"

Kamijou pushed Index out of the way and Stiyl caught her neck and pulled her in to him. A moment later...

The blades came swinging straight down, leaving vestiges of reflected moonlight in their wakes. Like a bolt of lightning, they struck at the point Index had just left.

One young man and three young women. All were about the same age as Kamijou. Instead of eccentric habits, they wore what you would if you were going for a walk through downtown. Their ordinary clothing, however, made the sinister glistening of the swords in their hands feel intensely out of place.

In an annoyed tone, Stiyl said, "A hand and a half sword, a bastard sword, a boar tuck, and a dress sword. Man, the people in this country really have a thing for *our* culture, don't they?!"

Kamijou thought to himself that those names were right out of a fantasy role-playing game. Their designs were diverse, their sizes ranging from a little more than a meter to a little less than two. And one of them, he had no idea what it was designed for—it looked like a rapier, except the very tip of it was a ball.

(Damn...it. The diversion didn't pull them away one bit, did it?!)

The four of them landed, separating him from the other two. Considering how narrow the path was, he couldn't just go around them and join back up with his comrades, either. Stiyl scattered a few rune cards and whipped out a flame sword.

"Take this. Keep it close if you don't want to die!"

He removed something from inside his clothing and threw it to Kamijou. He frantically caught it—it was a silver cross on a necklace.

"This is..."

(...What do I do with it?)

As he brought his face up to ask, though, one of the Amakusa girls silently sent the tip of a slender, double-edged sword about the length of a deck brush (apparently called a "dress sword") roaring toward him.

"Whaa?!"

Panicking, Kamijou jumped backward to dodge it. But then the girl charged, and he couldn't deal with it. The only reason he was able to dodge the next horizontal stroke was because he tripped over his own feet and fell onto his back.

"Watch out, Touma!!"

A moment after hearing Index's shout, he saw the girl bringing the dress sword down like a guillotine. He didn't break his fall; instead, he continued his backward roll and managed to evade it.

She didn't look like she'd used any magic at all.

The Imagine Breaker in his right hand wouldn't help him at all in a situation like this. As soon as he tried to do anything with it, she'd cleave it right off.

"Index!" shouted Kamijou, but there were four weapon-wielding assassins in the way, so he couldn't leap in carelessly. Stiyl was standing in front of Index with his flame sword in order to protect her, but two of the assassins went charging at them, intent on piercing both the shielding Stiyl and Index's delicate body with their swords.

Then, a dull noise rang out.

"—...?!"

Kamijou thought his heart was going to stop when he saw what was happening, but upon observing calmly, he saw that not a single drop of blood had been spilled. In fact, the two assassins who had rammed into Stiyl had gone straight through him.

A mirage.

The false image swayed, struck a sarcastic smile, and disappeared into the void. For some reason, the smile wasn't directed at the Amakusa assassins—it kind of seemed like his eyes were locked right on Kamijou's.

He no longer saw either of them anywhere.

The four assassins all turned their gazes to Kamijou.

(Hey, wait...A-aren't you supposed to agree on a signal or a meeting place when we have to run?! Are they making me the decoy again?! Something like this happened before, too. Back during the whole alchemist thing!!)

Dazed and confused and now on his own, Kamijou turned his back to the enemy and began to run as fast as he could. His sudden decision seemed to catch them off guard. He looked behind him as he ran to see that three of the assassins had spread out. Maybe they were searching for the disappeared Index and Stiyl.

And the last one...

Only the girl who had pointed her sword at him before was pursuing him. And she was fast. She was catching up to him, fast as a bird, despite holding such a heavy sword.

(Agh...shit...! I won't get away from her by running straight!)

In panic, he strayed from the circular viewing course and dove into a cramped space not seventy centimeters wide between two shops. It wasn't even an alleyway—it was just a gap.

He tried to run through the narrow gap, but he tripped over something and fell spectacularly to the ground. Apparently they had planned to renovate the shops, because there were signboards on the wall and a box of construction materials on the ground. That's what Kamijou had tripped over.

(Gah...! Don't leave your crap lying out like this!)

Even if he continued to run away, he'd find the girl's sword sticking through his back. He gave a quick glance at the contents of the scattered toolbox, looking for something that could serve as a weapon. But he quickly realized it was futile—he didn't think he'd be able to beat a real sword by swinging around a hammer. His assailant was quite capable of slicing in two anything he found to throw at her.

(...Slicing them? In that case!!)

Then, the girl holding the dress sword slid around the corner on her shoe soles and entered the gap as if she were a car drifting around it.

He grabbed a toothpaste-like bottle from the various tools littering the ground and immediately threw it behind him at her.

The girl, without realizing what was coming, swung her sword to cut it down and dove into the gap.

"!!"

He rose right away and crossed his arms in front of his head to protect it.

Her sword didn't stop. Her strike came roaring down perfectly vertically, cutting the wind itself, and closed in to slice both him and his upraised arms in two.

There was a dull noise, but the sword that struck his arms didn't even make it past one layer of skin.

Inside the toothpaste-like tube had been grease used for construction.

The sticky substance had completely dulled the sword's sharpness like blood or animal fat stuck to a katana. If her weapon had been as heavy as a Japanese katana, then even with a dulled blade, it probably would have broken his arm. But he couldn't expect a dress sword—a rapier, extravagantly adorned with precious stones—to do that.

"!?"

The girl panicked and tried to ready her dress sword again...

"Too slow!!"

...But before she could, he waved both hands to get the sword off of him and tackled the girl right in the stomach, bringing his arms around her. His entire body weight was enough to send her falling to the ground on her back. Kamijou was too much of a softie, though, not to put his hands around her head to prevent it from slamming into the ground.

As they collided, the air left the girl's lungs, and she hadn't moved since then. She had essentially been hit with a judo throw without being able to take the fall, so there was really no helping it.

"...Goddamn it. That hurt."

After just checking to make sure the girl wasn't hurt, Kamijou sank to the ground. When he looked up, he saw a night sky, enclosed on four sides by building walls. It was a sight he was used to seeing in alleys.

Back-alley brawls in Academy City didn't obey general Japanese common sense—they were far different from the normal, the average, the standard references. There were people who flung around strange powers that could be as dangerous as a handgun depending on how they used them. And there were also plenty of delinquents with special weapons meant to fight against such espers. Kamijou had still been able to move his body without being overtaken by fear when he saw the blade because it was just something else he'd gotten used to.

He stayed there for a few moments to catch his breath, but finally grabbed the dress sword the girl was carrying. It was slender but felt oddly heavy—maybe it had something to do with its center of gravity. He thought for a moment about whether or not he would be able to use it, but he gave up on that. He didn't even know how to hold a sword properly, so he didn't think he'd be able to deal an effective blow with one. And even if he did strike well with this real sword, just thinking about what it would do to the opponent made his spine freeze. It may have lost a lot of its sharpness, but he didn't want to go swinging it around.

Still, if he left the sword here, he'd have a problem when the Amakusa girl woke up. He decided to leave the area, dragging the sword behind him.

(Damn, are Index and Stiyl all right? What about Orsola? Should I meet up with them first or go search for her by myself?)

This was all definitely because they hadn't decided on how to contact one another or on a meeting point to get to later. But he had never even thought they might end up taking separate paths, so what was he supposed to do? As he mulled over what course to take, he left the gap between shops, sword dragging behind him, and returned to the circular viewing course—

—When just then, someone suddenly rammed into him from the side.

"?!"

It was the perfect sneak attack, launched from the shadow cast by the wall of a shop. He lost his balance, then immediately threw his sword to the side—he at least wanted to avoid impaling himself the instant he fell over.

Things had completely switched around from just a minute ago as he was tackled to the ground. He was able to take the fall, though, so he didn't suffer as heavy damage as the girl had. He clenched his fists to defend against being straddled and attacked further...

"...What?"

...But he opened them back up. If this were an enemy, something was odd. A black hood, a black habit, and not a single inch of skin exposed from finger to toe despite this heat...The sister's arms were behind her back, with her right hand and left elbow—and vice versa—stuck together, all wrapped up with white sticky tape. Her mouth had been sealed with the same tape, too. He looked closer to see that it was like cloth, and there were tons of strange symbols written all over it that looked kind of like slightly misshapen Japanese characters.

And, well, anyone could have looked to see it was Orsola Aquinas.

Kamijou could feel his whole body draining of strength at the overwhelming relief.

"Mgh! Mghh-mgh mhhff mggh mffh mgh mmmm mgh mmmmgh mgh ffffm mmmff!"

Orsola, her mouth covered by the strange-looking amulet thing, was looking at him, desperately trying to convey something to him.

"Huh? You came all the way to Japan, so you want to go see real-life sumo wrestlers, you say? You know, not every single person in this country does sumo wrestling. You really are an old lady, aren't you?"

"Mgghhh!!"

"What? Hey, wait, that was a joke!!"

Before he could defend himself, a fairly serious head-butt crashed into the pit of his stomach. He fell onto the ground with Orsola. At first he just coughed a few times, but then he noticed his hand on something soft. She didn't seem to realize it, but it was her large, warm, pulse-conveying chest.

(Buh! Bghahh?!)

His face turned bright red as he crawled out from underneath her, then ran his right index finger along the talisman thing covering her mouth. She looked surprised for a moment—he had touched her, though indirectly, on the lips—but a moment later, when she saw how the talisman thing had come off so naturally, her surprise was multiplied by a factor of ten.

"E-excuse me. You are the one who I met at the bus stop earlier, aren't you? But, why...?"

“I came to rescue you, obviously! Ah, shit, I’ll explain what’s going on later. Let’s just get out of here!”

Kamijou looked to and fro, and after making sure nobody was around, he picked up the dress sword he had thrown to the ground before.

Orsola was gaping a little. She spoke—not to him but to herself. “Wh-what?

“Are you really...here to rescue me? And it has nothing to do with the *Book of the Law*...?”

“Like I give a shit about something that stupid! Do I look weird enough to you that I’d come all this way for one old book?!” He madly scratched at his head and shouted, causing Orsola’s shoulders to quiver.

“I-I see. Umm, well...Thank you for taking care of me.”

“...Sure. I don’t really need thanks or anything. Anyway, what are you doing out here? What happened to the Amakusa?”

“Th-they appear to be fighting with the Roman Catholic Church. I managed to escape in the chaos...The Amakusa does not seem to be familiar with this sort of restraining and confinement, however.”

Dress sword in hand, he went behind her and destroyed the seals on her arms as well.

Orsola rubbed her now-freed hands and said, “Th-thank you very much. But, hmm...How did you...?”

“Hm? I just have that kind of ability...But it’s complicated, so maybe I shouldn’t bother with any weird explanations. You’d be stumped if I suddenly started rambling about scientific esper development, right? And by the way, you sure do seem calm in this situation. You’ll need to be a little more serious than that if we’re going to get away.”

“Nevertheless, they have been fighting near the entrance, and I was unable to go over the fence because my hands were tied—what should I have done? I had no choice, so I was searching for another...ex—?”

Before Orsola could finish, he grabbed her arm and dove into the narrow space between the two shops again. She nearly screamed when she saw the Amakusa girl lying there, but...

“...Quiet!”

...He hissed a warning and covered her mouth with his right hand.

They ran through the space and pressed themselves against the back wall of one of the shops. The pitter-patter of multiple sets of footsteps echoed from the front of the circular viewing course, then went away. It felt to him like they had realized Orsola had escaped and were looking for her rather than trying to follow him or Index and Stiyl. Them gripping strange swords and axes and hurling orders every which way struck him as extremely ominous.

When he heard their footsteps grow distant, Kamijou slid down the wall onto the ground. Orsola did the same, sitting elegantly next to him.

Part 7

The place where Kamijou and Orsola took a seat seemed to be in a blind spot for the Amakusa. There was a handful of low-hanging trees in the area behind the shop, and if they kept themselves low, they wouldn't be seen from afar.

But on the other hand, now that they'd found themselves a little hiding place, they were now unable to make a move. They heard the footsteps of the young men and women of the Amakusa running around the viewing course just nearby intermittently, so if they were to leave they would be spotted right away.

He was worried about Index and Stiyl. Now that he'd secured Orsola's safety, if they were stuck in the park unable to escape, they would be in needless danger. But there was no way for him to contact them, and it would be reckless to leave this place and look around the park for them.

"That special movement method thing can only be used from 12:00 to 12:05, so if we just stay put, it would ruin the Amakusa's plan, but..."

He went to check the clock on his cell phone, but the liquid crystal display backlight would stand out in this darkness, so he decided against it.

(It'd be real nice if I could use this to contact them, though.)

Index's cheapo phone was in their cat's mouth, and there was no way for him to know Stiyl's number.

When he stretched his legs, still sitting, they met the hilt of the dress sword he'd put on the ground. The sound and feeling brought Kamijou's attention from the inside back to the outside.

And that made him finally notice how heavy his breathing was.

He wiped his forehead and his hand came back with a lot more sweat than normal. Perhaps it was because of the tension—but just moving his body a little had made him break out into a sweat like he'd just run a marathon.

"Oh?" noticed Orsola, who took the lace handkerchief out of her sleeve. Kamijou tried to back away from her on the ground—he had a bad feeling about this.

"N-no. Don't worry, it's not a problem and look it will get your handkerchief dirty and this happened at the bus stop too didn't it and...mgh?!"

Before he could finish, he found the flower-scented handkerchief pressed against his face despite his argument.

"If you do not wipe it properly, you could come down with a summer cold. Now, then. Come to think of it, I get the feeling I did this sort of thing at the bus stop, too."

"I just said that same thing eight seconds ago, you know! You're just like an old lady—you never listen to people, and wait that hurts, that hurts!! Please, could you not stuff it in my mouth and no—grgh?!"

Kamijou, suffocating a little, desperately tried to repel this handkerchief assault, but he came up empty. Once Orsola had thoroughly deployed her handkerchief, she gave such a brilliant smile that he could almost see the nimbus behind her.

"Excuse me, but you were a citizen of Academy City, were you not?"

He coughed and groaned. "...Hm? Well, yeah."

"Then forgive me for asking, but what would someone from Academy City be doing in a place like this? It doesn't seem to be unrelated to the Roman Catholic Church's movements, but I was of the impression there were no churches in Academy City." Her voice sounded mystified.

His answer, on the contrary, made it sound unimportant. "Well, it's a little special in my case. I know a couple of Anglicans. I just got wrapped up all of a sudden in this, and now they're making me help them with who knows what."

Her shoulders twitched. Her action looked like she had heard something she couldn't ignore.

"Umm, should I not have? You were part of Roman Catholic Church, right? Does the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church not get along with each other?"

“No, that isn’t it at all.” She made a slow movement, as if she were thinking about something. “I would like to make certain—you are helping now because you were requested to cooperate by the Anglican Church, yes?”

“That’s right.” Kamijou nodded along, and Orsola stopped for a moment in thought.

“Oh? You are sweating a bit, aren’t you?”

“No, seriously, I’m fine already!”

“So then you are of Anglican descent, not Roman Catholic?”

“Urgh, *now* we’re back on topic?! W-well, no, it’s nothing crazy like that. Oh, and just so you know, I don’t have any pull with them. I’m from Academy City, after all.”

“I...see.” For some reason, she smiled in relief. “Indeed you are. It is obvious that one like you is better off having no connection to our world of the church.”

“...That right? Hmm. Then I guess there’s really no point in my holding on to this,” he said, looking at the cross Stiyl had given to him when they parted ways. He didn’t know what kind of power it had, but he’d caught it with his right hand, so it probably didn’t do anything anymore.

“Oh. Did you receive that from your Anglican acquaintance?”

“You can tell?”

“Christianity may be one religion, but there are various forms and types of the cross—like the Latin cross, the Celtic cross, the Maltese cross, Saint Andrew’s cross, the pectoral cross, and the papal cross.”

“Huh, I see. But there’s no point in my hanging on to this. I’d feel bad holding it as someone, er, outside the profession. So I’d like to give it to you, if that’s okay.”

He thought he’d said it casually, but Orsola nearly jumped off the ground. “Oh, my, is that all right?!”

“Um, yeah, sure. I don’t know why Stiyl gave it to me at all, but it probably doesn’t have much meaning. I mean, he knows I can’t use magic...He likes being sarcastic, so he could have just given it to me as a prank. Also, I don’t think this cross has any value anymore. I don’t have a clue about magic, but my right hand already touched it, after all,” said Kamijou, handing the cross necklace over to Orsola.

But then for some reason, she grabbed his hand like she was giving him a handshake. Then, she covered it with her other hand. “I have just one request to make of you.”

“Eh, uh...what?” The blundering Kamijou’s voice nearly cracked at the sensation—her hands were softer than he’d imagined.

“Would you be willing to put this around my neck yourself?”

“Huh? Well, sure, I don’t care.”

At his answer, Orsola closed her eyes and raised her chin to make it easier to put the necklace on her. It almost seemed kind of like she was looking for a kiss, and he dropped his gaze in a fluster. But that only brought into view her chest—which was ample already, now emphasized even further by her upturned chin.

“Bgah?!” He nearly exploded.

“? Is there something the matter?”

“N-no...Nothing’s wrong! Seriously, nothing!”

“?” Orsola seemed confused, her eyes still closed. Flustered, he undid the thin necklace clasp. And then he brought it around Orsola’s throat, which was covered by white cloth. After doing that, he realized he should have just gone behind her. When he did it from the front like this, it looked like he was trying to embrace her. It immediately set him on edge. His fingers touched the back of her neck. After his hands rattled a few times in nervousness, he finally managed to link the necklace chain back together.

Looking satisfied, she ran her fingers over the cross at her chest a few times. He watched them nonchalantly, and then realized his eyes were being sucked in by the swelling of her chest and quickly looked away. Even paying the least bit of attention to it would bring him to ruin. Unable to endure the silence, he groped around for any topic at all to talk about.

“By the way, you knew how to read the *Book of the Law*, didn’t you?”

“The way to read it—well, it’s more like the way to decode its encryption, but...” During the first part of her sentence she looked carefree, but then her body tensed up.

“Uhh, no, that’s not it. I don’t want you to tell me. I just kind of wanted to know why you were investigating that book in the first place. It’s pretty dangerous, isn’t it?”

Orsola stared at him for a little while but finally loosened up. “It would not be wrong to say that I desired power from it,” she said, shaking her head. “Do you know about the original copies of grimoires? Or how they cannot be destroyed by any means?”

“Mm. Yeah. I only heard it from someone, though. What was it? The characters, phrases, and sentences in a grimoire are like magic circles or something?”

“Yes. A grimoire is like a blueprint. It means that grimoires that show how to control lightning will end up also having safety measures that create lightning. With ones as strong as the original copies, even if a person has no mana, it amplifies the minute energies flowing from the earth, becoming a self-defense magic circle that continues to work almost permanently.” She briefly looked like she was thinking about something. “With current technology, it is impossible to get rid of grimoires that have reached this state. The most that can be done is to seal it so that nobody may ever read it. However,” she continued, “that is with current technology. If the original text is a kind of magic circle, then by appending characters and phrases to certain places to break the magic circle, like using a lever to switch rails on a train track, one should be able to use the magic circle against itself—in other words, to force the original text to destroy itself.” And at the end, she said clearly, “The power of grimoires doesn’t bring anyone happiness. The only thing they create is conflict. That’s why I was investigating its inner workings—in order to destroy these kinds of grimoires.”

Kamijou looked at Orsola again.

She had worked out a method to decode the *Book of the Law*, so he had thought her mind was swimming with eagerness to obtain the book’s power—but it was actually the exact opposite. She wanted to rob the book of its dangerous powers—that’s the only reason she researched grimoires.

He felt very slightly relieved at that, and then—

—There was a heavy sound coming from outside.

The sound came from in front of the shop—near the viewing course. However, before he could stand up in a hurry, something came into sight.

Something was dancing in the night sky. It looked like a person.

It was a priest, with red hair and black clothing.

“St...Stiyl?!”

Before Kamijou could say anything, Stiyl Magnus fell quickly toward the ground.

He crashed straight into the ground on his back, ruining the low shrubbery that had been concealing them. There were cuts all over his clothing, made by a bladed object, and blood was dripping from his skin.

(There was a loud noise in front of the shop, and he got blown all the way here—did he come over all that?!)

As Kamijou imagined the unimaginable, Stiyl, on the ground, said, “Damn...it. Kamijou...Touma? What are you doing? Run away, now!!”

No sooner had he begun to process those words that the two side walls of the shop he had his back to began to swell outward like a living being.

“?!” In front of Kamijou, who couldn’t understand what was happening, almost as if a killer whale were piercing the ocean surface and jumping, the shop walls smashed into a thousand pieces and someone jumped out. Behind the person, the building collapsed, its supports gone. Pieces of the building as thick as a human arm came clattering down right next to him—but he didn’t move a muscle.

In fact, he was smiling.

The man had a slender build, and yet he was wearing a T-shirt and jeans that didn’t fit him—they were so big a sumo wrestler could have worn them. He looked like he was in his mid-twenties. There were red crosses on his T-shirt’s white fabric, centered on his right arm. His hair looked like it had been intentionally spiked up with gel or something, but the most striking feature was its color. It was overwhelmingly black. His hair, which was probably black already and then dyed black, had an odd, beetle-like luster. The laces on his basketball shoes were abnormally long—more than a meter. With laces that length, Kamijou didn’t think you would trip over them even if you mistakenly stepped on them because of how much leeway you had. There was a necklace around his neck that looked like a leather strap, and four or five ten-centimeter-long battery-powered fans hung from it.

His fashion sense was strange, and Kamijou couldn’t quite tell what he was going for. But of course, the most inexplicable thing about him was what he was holding in his right hand.

A flamberge.

A two-handed French sword from the seventeenth century more than 180 centimeters in length. The undulations on the surface of the blade were its main characteristic—the curves were made to make wounds larger. Originally they were metal, or, if they were being used ceremonially, made of beaten gold. But this blade was pure white. It was like a plastic model one step away from completion. Maybe he had shaved a dinosaur bone down to use for it, or maybe it was a unique cluster of carbon—or maybe an aerospace material.

Kamijou was a simple high school student, so he couldn’t make the guess just by looking at it a little. At the very least, though, it didn’t look like metal. The large sword didn’t fit with modern society no matter how you looked at it, but this man was holding it lightly with one hand.

“Heh-heh. What are you doin’, mister Anglican priest? Come on—where’d your pride as an English gentleman go? Show it to me—show it to Tatemiya Saiji. Man, you wouldn’t even be able to protect one girl like this.”

Stiyl swore bitterly under his breath and took out rune cards.

He wasn't looking at the danger in front of him, this man with the sword.

He was looking beyond that—at a single sister in white, standing ready on the viewing course on the other side of the destroyed shop. Her fate was his top priority.

"Did you fight this whole time while protecting her...?" muttered Kamijou absently.

Stiyl's magic was like a game where you had to secure control points. He could only use powerful magic in places he had his rune cards hung up. For someone like him, this battle was something to be avoided. If he had to fight while moving the whole time, he wouldn't have time for his control-point-securing game. And if he had to fight in that situation while protecting Index on top of that, he had no choice but to literally use anything, even his body, as a shield.

"Don't...waste time thinking about things you don't need to," said Stiyl in a voice like he was going to spit up blood. "...All right, we've got Orsola Aquinas secured. As always, I can't tell whether that luck of yours is good or bad...Anyway, now we just need to make an opening and escape. We don't need to defeat that guy—if we can get away, we'll win."

Stiyl tried to stand up on his trembling feet, but he didn't seem able to put much strength into them. Tatemiya Saiji watched him merrily for a moment, then switched his gaze to Orsola.

"And why do we have to butt heads with each other at a time like this, anyway? I explained this about a million times. Orsola Aquinas...We have no intention of harming you."

The one explaining spoke in a flimsy tone that didn't seem to have much in the way of persuasive power. It even sounded like he was implying disappointment at his own subordinates for having let Orsola escape.

Orsola looked at the destroyed shop, the wounded Stiyl, and then Tatemiya's flamberge, then said, "I am certainly aware that your words are filled with hope. However, I cannot have faith in peace gained through the use of weapons."

"That's a shame. I mean, it's not like it will do you any good to go back to the Roman Catholic Church."

Tatemiya swung the sword in his right hand around a bit, as if checking his shoulders.

"..."

Kamijou silently moved in front of Orsola to cover her.

He didn't have a weapon. He couldn't win against this opponent by swinging around something he was unfamiliar with. It would probably be better not to go with any weapon rather than a sword that was really heavy and he couldn't use.

Tatemiya first looked at Kamijou's face, then at the dress sword at his feet. "No martial arts stance, and no spiritual item. And no magical symbols hidden in your clothes, either. Completely unarmed, in the purest sense of the word, eh? Hah, I didn't intend to cross swords with an *amateur*, but...well, we can't all have what we want. Did you steal that sword from Uragami?"

He was emitting a chilling, invisible pressure that seemed to be twisting and warping the outline of his body.

Kamijou didn't recall any name like that, but... "If you mean your lackey, she's sleeping over there. I made sure she didn't hit the back of her head, though, so she's alive."

"...What, and that makes it all right? You makin' fun of us or something?"

Tatemiya's tone now sounded anything but lighthearted. Kamijou felt like it gave him a glimpse of the man's humanity.

His opponent wasn't just a monster—he was a person who would get angry over the safety of a friend.

"Then if you're still able to fight for someone else, could you please put that sword down? I don't want to fight someone like you if I don't have to."

"Oh, sure, I'd be all for it, but we've got our own problems, y'see. Our main enemy might be the Roman Catholic Church, but if the Anglican Church is connected to this, then we can't let you off the hook, either. Plus, we can't give Orsola to anyone like that."

Tatemiya swung his big, nearly two-meter sword lightly up in the air like a cheerleader baton before continuing. "That means you're already a target, too. 'Course, if you drop to your knees right now and surrender, you won't have to see any blood you don't want to."

He was smiling, but his voice sounded apologetic. He probably predicted how Kamijou would answer before he even made the proposition.

Kamijou was scared, for sure. He knew what professional magicians were like. The ones who gave the most trouble were those who didn't overestimate magic.

People with absolute power, like Aureolus's alchemy, would only prepare one trump card. On the other hand, those without an excessive faith in trump cards, like Tsuchimikado Motoharu, would instead set up their hand with enough cards, countless cards, to make up for it.

Saiji clearly belonged to the second group. He could probably send Kamijou's head flying with one sweep of that flamberge, even without using magic.

One look at his ability to take down Stiyl without suffering a single wound (protecting Index though the magician may have been) spoke volumes of the man's depth.

Kamijou shuddered—this wasn't someone he could beat squarely. It was like telling a relatively quick-footed child to race an Olympic track-and-field athlete. Would it be better...to obey and surrender?

He couldn't match the man's skill, nor had he set anything up beforehand to get around that.

Still...

(What would happen to Stiyl?)

The priest, still bent over, was glaring at Tatemiya, his breathing ragged.

Stiyl had his own goals—and he was here because he believed they would do Index good. For him, failure just wasn't an option. Neither the hopeless reality nor any words Kamijou could give would be enough to hold Stiyl Magnus down.

And if Kamijou couldn't stop him...

...Then it was pretty evident what was waiting for him.

(What would happen to Index?)

Even now, the girl looked like she'd spring between Kamijou and Tatemiya given the slightest opportunity.

If Stiyl and Tatemiya clashed, if they exchanged blows even once, they wouldn't be able to play the surrender card anymore. If it came to that, she'd probably do anything to let Kamijou, an amateur to magic, escape. No matter how little strength they had—no matter how clear the gap in their power was—no matter how much Kamijou hoped against it.

And finally...

(What would happen to Orsola?)

The Roman Catholic sister was uneasily glancing back and forth between Kamijou and Tatemiya.

Tatemiya Saiji desired the knowledge, the technique, the *power* that the *Book of the Law* possessed. So long as that was true, then Orsola wouldn't be killed here. In fact, they would probably even make sure any stray bullets didn't strike her.

But if Orsola were taken away from here, she'd be brought to the Amakusa's base. If she were to refuse to instruct them on the way to decode the *Book of the Law*, then it was pretty clear what would be in store for her.

Tatemiya and Amakusa weren't looking for Orsola Aquinas herself, but rather the way to decipher the *Book of the Law*. He didn't want to think about what would become of her after they got the information they needed.

"—The way to read it—well, it's more like the way to decode its encryption, but..."

—And she never even *wanted* the book's power.

"—It would not be wrong to say that I desired power from it."

—And she was trying her hardest *not* to cause this to happen.

"—One should be able to use the magic circle against itself—in other words, to force the original text to destroy itself."

—These people smiling before him were scorning all her tireless efforts, ignoring her feelings, and trying to use her as a tool for their own greed.

"—The power of grimoires doesn't bring anyone happiness. The only thing they create is conflict. That's why I was investigating its inner workings—in order to destroy these kinds of grimoires."

Kamijou pushed the dress sword aside with his foot and took a step forward.

Whether it be unsightly or comical, Kamijou was the only one here who could clench his fist and stand up to them.

Did he have a reason to loosen those five tightened fingers?

"...Don't look down on me," said Kamijou lowly, putting even more force into his tightly gripped right fist.

Tatemiya Saiji, who had been watching him, gave a sigh that sounded sincerely regretful. "Those're some eyes you've got there. Glaring at me like that's gonna make me feel sorry for you. No, no, I'm seriously sorry about this. I know what I gotta do, but that straightforward response—it's starting to make me not want to kill ya."

Tatemiya shook his undulating flamberge lightly.

“But if you say so, then who am I to refuse? It’s your funeral.”

Right as those words left his mouth...

Kamijou heard a loud explosion. The sound of Tatemiya’s feet hitting the ground alone had explosive energy. Before Kamijou’s body could even freeze in tension, his opponent took his first step forward. One more step until his blade would reach.

When he saw the light glinting off the sword blade, conveying the man’s brute force, Kamijou’s mind was stunned, like a frog in a snake’s gaze.

He reflexively thought to cover his face with his hands, but that wouldn’t be nearly enough to protect him.

(Gh, gah...! Don’t fear...just move!!)

Kamijou commanded his quivering body in desperation and finally took his first step of a run. Not backward but forward. Tatemiya saw Kamijou charge at him from a little bit to the right and actually gave a dubious expression. He probably couldn’t figure out why an amateur was jumping straight into his attack range.

“Hah!!”

Exhaling, Tatemiya brought his sword straight down over him like a bolt of lightning.

There was a roaring cracking sound as it split the quiet night air.

A single, decisive attack meant to split Kamijou, speeding at him like a bullet, in two.

“...!”

This time, it wasn’t just a little bit—he devoted his entire body and jumped at a ninety-degree angle to the right. The giant blade cleaved through the droplets of sweat dancing in the air. Jumping in a way that completely ignored all of his momentum put a huge load on his ankles. Kamijou failed to land, lost his balance, and crashed into the back wall of a store beside them.

“Shh!!”

Then, Tatemiya, rotating his entire body, whipped his blade to the side in a straight horizontal sweep. But it seemed like he noticed it after he started the swing...that Kamijou, his back against the wall, was smiling fearlessly.

(I can do this...!!)

Kamijou crouched down as far as he possibly could.

He knew that if he fled to the side when his opponent brought the sword down, he'd normally follow up with a horizontal slash. Bringing the sword up again would have created an additional step.

With his body as low as he could get it, he charged Tatemiya, his face low enough that he could lick the ground. He didn't need to think about anything but a horizontal slashing attack. Even if Tatemiya had tried to unleash a top-to-bottom one, he'd be a beat too late. If he did that, then Kamijou's fist would reach him before he could swing his sword completely.

So Tatemiya Saiji had gone with a directly horizontal sweep, just as Kamijou had predicted from the beginning.

Kamijou let the sword graze right over his head, and though his heart was in the iron grip of terror...

"Woh...ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!" he shouted, clenched his fist, and lunged right into Tatemiya.

Even Orsola, his ally, gulped at his drive.

Right after Tatemiya swung his powerful, two-handed stroke, he couldn't do anything about Kamijou's fist...

And then... Tatemiya Saiji vanished.

Tatemiya had been right in front of him, but now he was about one meter back. And his sword, which had completed a horizontal strike, was somehow already prepared over his head.

It was like he had turned back time and redone it.

No—as if he had used an illusion or something to lure Kamijou Touma out.

"Ah...?—?!" A chill came over him, and he rolled to the side, when...

The vertical attack split the ground in two like a piece of paper being torn apart. Because of all the friction, the hollowed-out earth glowed orange like magma. No one could look at this and think it obeyed any physical laws.

(Magic?—Then I'll...!)

He put energy into his right hand. If that sword was a magical article, then he might be able to destroy it by touching it with his right hand. So he went to thrust his fist toward the blade coming at him.

"No...! Don't do it! Touma!!"

He just barely stopped his fist at Index's shout. Defenselessly, he spotted the young girl thoughtlessly running out to him out of the corner of his eye.

(No way...You mean it's not magic?!)

Tatemiya's behavior.

That downward swing, so fast he couldn't see it, and that powerful attack that had split the ground open.

Were all of those simply feats of strength? He shuddered.

"No, don't! Index, don't come over here!!" he shouted, but it didn't sway her. Tatemiya's blade severed even the sound as it swung down. Kamijou had figured an attack with his right hand would deal with this and hadn't thought of any alternatives. And he didn't have the time to anymore. His eyes ballooned as he watched the blade closing in on him.

"TOFF (Thy original flame,) TMIL (Thy meaning is light,) PDAGGWATSTDASJTM! (Please deliver a great gentle warmth and the sword to defend a strict justice, to me!)"

At the same time as Stiyl's shout, there was an explosion as a flame sucked in oxygen and exploded. The flame sword he gripped sliced through the dark of night, and Tatemiya was forced to divert his attention to it for a moment.

"Shit!"

Meanwhile, as Tatemiya was facing to the right, Kamijou jumped the other way, barely managing to get out of range.

Or at least, he tried to.

Tatemiya, looking in the wrong direction, slid in the same direction Kamijou was running. His legs weren't moving. It was an unnatural movement, as though he were slipping on ice.

(Magic...!?)

Kamijou's spine froze, and just then...

The sword whirled around like a tornado, going for a straight horizontal cut. Kamijou immediately ducked to try and avoid it...

...But a heavy impact came striking the evading Kamijou's flank.

He looked carefully and saw a soccer ball–like object made of clear ice buried in his body. The instant he realized it, the ice ball disappeared strangely, like it was being

painted over. Kamijou was sent flying into the ground by the ice attack and began to roll over.

—Let's go back to when Kamijou had just clashed with Tatemiya.

The instant the young man looked like he would be killed, Index couldn't help but start running.

(So that's...the Amakusa...)

Index shivered as she ran.

And though she shivered, she found herself in admiration.

The techniques the Amakusa used were, in and of themselves, quite commonplace. At the very least, they weren't flashy or unique and didn't possess vast attack power—like Stiyl's Innocentius or Aureolus's Ars Magna.

However, they used that fact against itself.

Kanzaki Kaori's wire technique, Nanasen, stood out the most here. The Amakusa's basic strategy could be summed up with one word: deceit. If you thought it was a magic attack, it would just be a simple trick—and if you thought it was a trick, then real magic meant to kill would come at you.

Index ran.

Kamijou and Tatemiya felt strangely far away.

Obviously you would take entirely different defensive measures based on whether something was magic or not. If you misread it, you'd end up taking quite a bit of damage.

Index had a way of preventing magic with her Spell Intercept. Magic started from a person's thoughts—so by acting and speaking in such a way to disrupt the mind of someone casting a spell, you could cause it to go out of control. For example, whispering nonsensical words into the ear of a person trying to say tongue twisters to induce mistakes.

However, Spell Intercept didn't work on Amakusa techniques.

Generally speaking, their spells, charms, and magic circles were unique—hidden within casual, everyday actions and words. They picked out subtle religious rituals and built techniques out of them. And this Tatemiya person had performed actions with magical meaning in a split second and was activating magic ten or twenty techniques at a time in the middle of combat.

With Index's voice and skill, she couldn't slip Spell Intercept into a single motion that took only a split second to complete. By the time she thought to do something, Tatemiya's single motion was already finished. If she wanted to obstruct his magic, she would need to keep up with his swordplay movements, which he'd built into his techniques' activation conditions. But Index obviously didn't have any way of using such masterful martial arts abilities.

As a result of all this, Index jumping in wouldn't be able to force Tatemiya Saiji to retreat. Index, being a magical professional herself, realized the difference in their strength—and not in terms of simple quantity, but also the fact that his kind of power was overwhelmingly mismatched with her.

Kamijou Touma took the magical ice-bullet attack and fell to the ground.

Tatemiya Saiji whipped his flamberge up into the air as though he were about to hit a nail with a hammer.

Index didn't have any way of stopping that attack. Her Spell Intercept wouldn't do much against Amakusa techniques, either.

"Touma!!"

But Index didn't stop running.

She didn't think any longer of what would happen afterward.

Stiyl Magnus thought his heart would stop when he saw the defenseless Index jump out. She had no fighting power. If she stood up to Tatemiya, she would be sliced in two within seconds.

"Gah...!!"

He had one flame sword in each hand. He didn't have enough time to place all the rune cards to activate Innocentius again.

If he jumped out now, Stiyl would get to Tatemiya before Index. He might be able to distract him by attacking with the flame swords and blowing them up the moment they clashed with the opponent's sword.

But Kamijou stood between Stiyl and Tatemiya.

If Stiyl pointed his sword at Tatemiya, it would pierce Kamijou's body as well.

For just a moment, the flame priest's face warped into a bitter expression.

For a few moments, he was conflicted. And when that ended, the light of determination was already in his eyes.

(I made an oath long ago...)

Stiyl Magnus desperately worked his bleeding mouth to steady his breathing.

(..."Relax, and go to sleep. Even if you forget everything, I won't forget a thing. I will live and die for your sake!!")

In order to protect that which he held most dear, he focused on the young man's back and readied his flame swords.

All the air vented from his body, and his consciousness wavered. He looked at Tatemiya, bringing his sword up in front of Kamijou. He frantically restrained himself from passing out and tried to somehow get a handle on the situation.

His feet trembled. It would be impossible for him to avoid Tatemiya's next attack.

Index had already started running, and in a few seconds, when she ran into Tatemiya, she'd be killed instantly.

He glanced behind him—Stiyl had his flame swords up, but Kamijou was a wall in the way of him using them.

Kamijou Touma revved his mental engine to full before even a second had passed.

So that nobody would be missing. So that nothing would be lost.

So that everyone could go home smiling.

"...Do it."

He clenched his fist.

"Attack us both, Stiyl!!"

He rallied every last bit of strength in his body and charged for Tatemiya Saiji without hesitation.

Those few words confused Tatemiya Saiji.

The Anglican sister was approaching him from behind, but he could easily slice her in two. The young man had jumped for him, his fist clenched, in order to stop that, but there was still more than enough time for him to cut the boy down and then deal with the sister.

But behind that young man...

The Anglican priest had burst into a sprint, his flame swords at his hips.

“!?”

However one looked at it, if that priest kept charging, he would end up having to go through the young man with his swords. But there was no hesitation in the priest’s eyes. They were sharp as a knife blade, and there was a savage smile on his lips, as if calculating how to defeat his enemy were the only thing on his mind.

Tatemiya tried to ready his flamberge to defend against the flame swords. But when he did, the young man brought his right arm behind him and went to deliver a rock-hard punch.

“Crap...?!”

He wouldn’t have enough time to deal with his punch and then defend against the flame swords’ attack afterward. Plus, those flame swords weren’t for slashing—they were for exploding. If he screwed up on how he responded to them, he’d be in mortal danger. If he didn’t prioritize them and inject an anti-fire technique into his flamberge, the sacrificial boy could be engulfed in the explosion.

(It’s just a punch from an amateur—no problem; I’ve had a basic shock-absorbing technique on me since this battle began. I only need to worry about those flame swords, so I’ll compose a technique for them right now!)

Tatemiya brought his sword down into a horizontal stance. The flamberge was flame aspected, given the origin of its name—a flame-like sword—and his horizontal leveling of it was the code for “suppress,” giving him the impromptu technique that would suppress flames.

(Fine, got you, finished! When your careless flames come to hit me, I’ll counter them with everything I’ve got...!!)

Tatemiya Saiji’s tongue came out of his mouth. It wriggled around and licked his lips greedily.

The priest charged at the young man’s back, as if to assault him. The flame swords in his hands were aiming straight through the boy’s body and right at Tatemiya’s center.

(I win!!)

—Or so he thought.

Tatemiya tried to use a flame-resistant technique to try and blow back the heat and flames that were supposed to come at him when the flame swords exploded, but contrary to his expectations, nothing happened.

The young man's right fist was all the way behind his body, like a hammer about to drive into him. And the priest's flame swords had stabbed right up to that fist and nearly into it.

With a sound like a balloon popping, the flame swords in the priest's hands scattered into little embers and disappeared.

"Wha...? Nnh, gahh...?!"

Tatemiya Saiji, who had only been considering his counterattack timing after he'd used his flame-resistant technique to defend, didn't understand what had just happened.

An ear-splitting roar came as the young man's fist plunged right into Tatemiya Saiji's face.

(Ga, bah...!! Wh, ah, it went through...the shock-absorbing tech...?!)

Tatemiya's body bent all the way backward. Before he could regain his lost balance, the young man and priest both rammed into his body at full speed. Their pressure and weight made Tatemiya Saiji feel like he'd been hit with a battering ram—he flew horizontally through the air and slammed into the ground hard.

That's when Tatemiya appeared to lose consciousness.

The flamberge flew from his hands and came down to the ground with a clatter.

CHAPTER 3

English Puritan Church.

Anglican_Church.

Part 1

The battle was over.

Kamijou figured it was because the Amakusa's command had crumbled all at once, since they lost their leader, Tatemiya. He basically understood because the sounds from afar had abruptly stopped, and the tingling, tense air had cleared. He hadn't been given a thorough explanation, since they hadn't met back up with Agnese and the sisters, but it seemed like victory had visited the Roman Catholic Church. If that wasn't the case, then it was strange that the Amakusa weren't sending reinforcements to Kamijou's group, since they'd been acting so uncontrollable and crazy.

He was a little concerned about the welfare of the Roman Catholic Church and the Amakusa Church, but Stiyl had reported no deaths on either side, and that the Roman Catholics had placed the Amakusa members under arrest. He wondered for a moment where all the man's confidence came from, but it seemed like he was communicating by using his cigarette ember. The way the smoke billowed apparently conveyed his intent, but Kamijou obviously couldn't tell by looking at it.

Tatemiya Saiji had been seated nearby, and rune cards were attached to his limbs, chest, back, and forehead. It was apparently a brutal technique—one that would immediately douse him in flames if he were to move too much.

And, since Stiyl had gone to bring Orsola to Agnese and the others, Kamijou, Index, and Tatemiya were the only three people here.

And...

"Touma, Touma! Are you okay? Are you hurt? Does it hurt anywhere?!"

...At the moment, a white-faced Index was trying to take off his clothes.

"Hey, would you quit that, Index?! I'm fine, nowhere hurts really—bwah? A-are you an idiot or something?! Watch where you're touching!"

“Then make absolutely sure of it yourself! Like if there’s anywhere that hurts or that’s hot or something!!” she shouted, nearly crying.

Kamijou finally realized how much he’d worried her. But making a direct comment along those lines would be incredibly embarrassing, so he listened to Index without saying anything and checked himself.

“Okay. My side hurts a little, but that’s about it. It’s not like I can’t move or anything.”

“Really? It’s really no big deal?”

“Yeah. And I mean, I think I’m pretty accustomed to this. Back-alley fights with espers everywhere are pretty dangerous in their own right. And I fought magicians a whole bunch of times over summer break, remember?”

“I see...That’s good...” Index made a face he found difficult to judge whether it was smiling or crying. He grew vehemently embarrassed and couldn’t help but look away, but...

“...So then I can bite your head all I want, Touma.”

“What?”

He couldn’t ignore that—and the moment he heard it, the wild-animal girl Index launched a vicious assault on his head with her teeth.

“B-byaah?! Wait a second, Index! One second you’re worried about my health, and the next this?! What’ll you do if you make another wou—gyaahhh?!”

“I’m biting you because I’m worried about you! What in God’s name were you thinking, Touma?! You’re crazy! Not only did that guy have a huge sword, he was also a magician! And you went up against him with just a fist! Maybe you should have used that weapon on the ground! And the enemy actually said that if an amateur surrendered, he wouldn’t take your life! What were you thinking getting all determined?! You’re hopeless!”

“Wait, wait, you might kill me if you keep doing this, Index-san, ow! I got it! I sincerely apologize on all fronts for my own actions today, so would you please lighten up with the biting...?!”

“And also, also! Did you actually think this through to the end? Did you even know that Amakusa guy would need time to build a fire-resistant defensive technique?! If you messed up on how long he was gonna take for it, you would have gotten cut right in half!!”

“No, no plan or anything. That was actually me going in for a real suicide attack, it’s just that Stiyl is so considerate, I had no idea about flame-resistant or defenses or—wait owwww?! I’b sowwy I’m sorry Index-san pleeeaaaassseeeee?!”

Kamijou thoroughly delivered the kind of scream he would have never voiced in serious situations. Finally, Index seemed to feel better.

"...Hmph. You're stupid. And reckless," she murmured to herself as she put her small chin upon Kamijou's hair.

(Uh, wha...?!)

Index, tired of being angry, probably did it with the same feeling one would when they got bored and put their head on their desk, but Kamijou's heart immediately began beating twice as quickly. Aside from the sensation of a girl's chin on his head, her long, silvery hair was giving off a sweet fragrance that wafted refreshingly to his cheeks, and above all, since he and Index were facing each other, her chest was super close—not even two centimeters from the tip of his nose. Normally he wasn't aware of it, but this close, he was made to notice just a slight bit of a bulge.

(Why are all her attacks changing speed like this? Oh, I get it. Now she's gonna realize I'm looking at her chest and end up biting me again, right?!)

Kamijou edged into a defensive stance, but contrary to his expectations, Index simply pulled herself away.

She stared up at the night sky for a few moments, listening carefully. "It's so quiet. You wouldn't think that many people were fighting."

"Yeah." He nodded along with her.

But right now, this silence was welcome. At the very least, he didn't need to worry about swinging around swords and lances, or people yelling angrily, or the sounds of things breaking.

"Hey."

And then, all of a sudden, Tatemiya Saiji, seated nearby, spoke up to Kamijou. There was an odd tinge of impatience in his voice. Before Kamijou looked over there, Index spread out her arms and went in front of him as a shield.

Tatemiya glared at them and said, "Shit. Sorry, but could you take these off for me, man? Well, I mean, I know I'm askin' the impossible. But I can't just leave her alone like this."

Kamijou frowned.

(Huh? Who does he mean by "her"?)

It hit him a moment later: Orsola Aquinas.

“What are you saying, idiot? Why would we let the most dangerous person here out of our—”

“You’re the idiot here! Come on, just hear me out, all right? Do you *actually* plan on handing her over to the Roman Catholic Church, man? You probably have no idea what kind of treatment she’ll be getting after this.”

Kamijou didn’t know what to say.

“No, Touma.” Index actually sounded calmer than him. “This person uses his words as a weapon. So don’t listen to him. How would our enemy benefit from telling us the truth, anyway—”

“*She’s going to be killed*,” said Tatemiya Saiji, cutting her off. “Listen, I’ll just tell you the ending first. Don’t hand her over to the Roman Catholic Church. They *actually* want to kill her.”

“And you’re Orsola’s ally, so you want us to untie you and let you escape? You’ve gotta be joking. That’s way too convenient. You’re the ones who kidnapped her in the first place! And you stole the *Book of the Law*, too! She knows how to decipher what’s inside it, so you kidnapped her, gave all these people weapons, and fought, and now you’re saying *we’re* the bad guys? That’s the dumbest fucking thing I’ve ever heard!!” Kamijou was so mad that he yelled loud enough to hurt his throat.

Tatemiya, however, didn’t care.

“We didn’t steal the *Book of the Law*.”

(What?)

Kamijou’s mind blanked for a moment.

“I mean, just think about it. What would we need it for? Roman Catholicism is the world’s largest Christian denomination. It’s got more than two billion followers in all. Would we want the thing so badly we’d pick a fight with *that*? It’s just the *Book of the Law*.”

“Don’t give him a serious reply, Touma!” Index tensed up and said flatly, “I heard the Amakusa lost its priestess, and now it’s gotten a lot weaker. So you tried to make up for that missing strength by getting your hands on the unknown grand magic in the *Book of the Law*. Am I wrong?”

“I just said—why would we need power in the first place?”

Tatemiya Saiji smiled. The expression, with a bead of sweat sliding down his face, looked like he could have been impatient because he was running out of time.

Kamijou was perplexed. “Because if you didn’t have it, you’d lose to other factions!”

“Yeah—if they even *attacked* us, man. But you just have to remember this. The Amakusa Church has been oppressed for an extremely long time. Do you think we don’t have any countermeasures for it? Nobody has ever found our base, and there are still plenty of eddy points for our specialty, the Miniature Pilgrimage, set up by Inou Tadataka, that no one knows about.”

Kamijou suddenly felt like he’d been caught off guard by the man’s words.

That was right—they only knew twenty-three of the points used for the special movement method.

“How would anyone attack our base when no one but us even knows where it is?”

(He has a point.)

Nobody knew where the Amakusa’s headquarters was, so if they fled there, Orsola wouldn’t be able to be rescued again. Because of that, the point of this battle had been to settle things before they activated the special movement method.

No one would be able to attack their stronghold—so they never needed to prepare to defend it in the first place.

“Then...”

Did the Amakusa have some other objective than defense? Could they have been going after the *Book of the Law* to expand their military might?

Or were they...

“Lemme ask you something, man. What kind of grimoire is the *Book of the Law*, exactly?”

Saiji had been talking to him, but since he was a total amateur when it came to magic, he meekly looked at Index.

She began explaining, her expression reluctant. “The *Book of the Law* is a grimoire written in an extremely complex code—and actually, its grammar is strange enough that it wouldn’t be an overstatement to say that it was written in a completely different language all its own. It’s said that the only one to ever decipher it properly was Edward Alexander, the one who wrote it, also known as Crowley. He stated that the most important part of the book was ‘Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law,’ but nobody knows what that means.” She continued smoothly. “The *Book of the Law*’s contents contain instruction from an enigmatic being called Aiwass, who could be said to be his guardian angel or one who must not be forgiven. One theory states it lets you freely use techniques that angels can use. It has enormous power. They say that as soon

as you open the book, it announces the end of the age of Christianity and the beginning of a new era."

"That's the thing." Tatemiya Saiji smiled meaningfully. "That's the most important part. The *Book of the Law* does have enormous power. If it really did allow anyone to use angelic techniques, the era of a Christian-dominated world would be over before the day was up. After all, everyone would be able to use powers stronger than the pope himself. The entire pyramid structure of the Church would come toppling down, but..." He paused for a moment. "But I don't actually think everyone thinks everyone wants this power."

"Why not? I'm not a magician, so I'm not involved in this. But don't you professional magicians want to use stronger magic so you can move up in status?"

"There's the question of *why* we would need to move up in status in the first place. We don't need that kind of power. In fact, neither should any true disciples of Christianity."

"But the Roman Catholic Church manages the *Book of the Law* because they want its strength, don't they?"

This mystified Kamijou, but Index seemed to understand what he was getting at, since she made a sour expression.

"Here's the thing." He smiled quietly and answered the young man's innocent question.

"Why would the Roman Catholic Church, the biggest Christian denomination with the most disciples in the world—two billion—want to *end the era of Christianity*?"

It hit him.

People who were already satisfied at the current balance wouldn't have any reason to desire change. In fact, that went even more for those who reigned supreme in this day and age.

"The Roman Catholic Church was never *looking* for a weapon as strong as the *Book of the Law*. What they need is a weapon to help them gain control of the world, not one that would smash the world to pieces."

Kamijou and Index both fell silent.

It felt like the darkness of the night had grown many times thicker all of a sudden.

"So they decided to secretly get rid of the one person who could draw out the book's power. But she realized that, too. She used all the power she had to get to somewhere the Roman Catholic Church couldn't reach...In other words, she manipulated her schedule so she could come here to Japan. Ironically enough, the *Book of the Law* was set to be transported here already. And then she came looking for help from the local

Christian sect—the Amakusa. When all's said and done, we were really just helping her make her great escape." Tatemiya heaved a sigh. "The book being stolen was a big farce put up by the Roman Catholic Church. There's no way we would steal it. They were probably trying to connect her disappearance with the book. If they came as a set, then everyone would think the kidnapping was so we could get our hands on it. If she had been the only thing to disappear, people might put it down to some other possibility. Like that she defected in order to flee the Roman Catholic Church, for example."

Good and evil, offense and defense, capturing and rescuing.

Kamijou witnessed the single moment all of these flipped around.

"So can you still say that the Roman Catholic Church is in the right here? Can you say with one hundred percent certainty that returning Orsola Aquinas to them was the right move?"

"..."

"If you can, then let's hear your proof. If you can't, then stand up and face your own doubts! Who's the real enemy here? Anyone could understand that if they just thought about it calmly!!"

Kamijou took one deep breath at Tatemiya Saiji's angry shout.

He closed his eyes.

He neatly arranged all the information in his head and started to verify it piece by piece.

(Think.)

(Whose points are correct—the Roman Catholics or the Amakusa?)

(Where is the contradiction?)

"I can't. I still don't trust you completely."

"...Why not?"

"Even if everything you say is true," began Kamijou slowly, "then why did Orsola run away from you? I first met Orsola walking around by herself near Academy City. Stiyl explained before that the Roman Catholic Church and the Amakusa Church would have been fighting at the time. I think she probably looked for an opening in the fighting and *ran from both parties*. But if that's the case, then why?"

"..."

“What you’re saying could be a lie. And even if it’s true, that doesn’t mean the enemy of our enemy is our friend. So I’ll ask you. Why did Orsola Aquinas run away from you?”

If they were truly Orsola’s allies, then she wouldn’t have had any reason to run away.

Tatemiya smiled quietly at Kamijou’s implicit declaration. It was a very weak smile, like he was tired of life. “She was the same.”

“The same?”

“Yeah. The same as you, man. She did come to us asking for help—but at the very end, she wasn’t able to trust us completely. She probably thought this about us. ‘They have no reason to help me at the cost of making the largest Christian denomination, the Roman Catholic Church, their enemy. They must be after the method of deciphering the *Book of the Law*.’ “

Kamijou fell mum.

Tatemiya’s eyes appeared to both be watching him and gazing at something far in the distance.

“Man, barking up the wrong tree, that’s for sure. Why would we need to get our hands on that book?”

“? Then what did you try and save her for?” asked Kamijou carefully.

“*We didn’t have a reason*,” answered Tatemiya without missing a beat. “And we never did, either. We’ve done it this way since the beginning. And our current generation is even more exceptional. Why on earth do you think our priestess, that girl, was ordained our leader at such a young age? She stood before an evil dragon that could swallow mountains whole, just to protect one young girl’s dream. She defended a small village from a big military force so that she could hear the one person’s dying request. And from behind, we watched her this whole time. It may only have been a little while, but for us, it feels like we’ve done so forever.”

Tatemiya Saiji spoke as though he were chasing the illusions of bygone days.

And as if boasting about his own family.

“That is why we do not mistake our path, and why we do not mistake how we use our strength—and how we’ve led ourselves along the straight and narrow. Many things are easier said than done—but she would actually do them. Her example taught us that people could become this strong. That people could become this kind. That all of that was within our reach.”

Quiet dominated the air.

Tatemiya gritted his teeth to break the silence.

"...And that path she lived her life walking—we destroyed all of it."

"What?"

"Our deaths—our inexperience—caused the priestess to suffer. She was always the last one standing, and she began to believe it was her fault that everyone around her was falling. That ain't a joke. Our minds and bodies were what caused everything—the fact that we wished to stand together with her on the battlefield, and the fact that we fell in the process. And now we're in this sorry state. The priestess didn't do anything wrong, but we forced her to leave the place she belonged by herself."

Tatemiya talked as if stabbing his own face with a sword.

His voice, wrung from deep in his throat, contained vivid emotion.

"We stole her home with our inexperience. That's why we need to offer her home to her again. One where nobody gets hurt, one where nobody must grieve, one where everyone fights to put smiles on others' faces. A home where we all stand as one without hesitation to protect someone's happiness."

"..."

"That's why we extended a helping hand to Orsola—because she wanted help.

"Because we thought our priestess's home should be a world in which people would do that normally."

In the end, they weren't actually fighting for advantage or disadvantage, as they assumed from interorganizational deals. They were just fighting because the circumstance dictated it—not because they were looking to gain anything from it. The circumstance in question was too deeply entwined with the history of their group, so they couldn't get Orsola to understand. It had just created a misunderstanding. Was that it?

(That was only if everything Tatemiya was saying were true, though.)

Kamijou had begun to want to believe his words. But there was still no proof for any of them. Even if he felt like he wanted to trust Tatemiya, he couldn't find any evidence that would let him do so absolutely. He gritted his teeth. Who should he believe? Who was telling the lies? Many thoughts spun round and round in his mind, when...

...Suddenly, they heard an ear-splitting yell from far away.

No—it was nothing so lackluster as a yell.

A shriek. A scream. A screech. *And if he had to guess*, it had come from a woman. But did it really come from a person? Kamijou wasn't even confident enough to say that. The high-pitched whine, like fingernails scratching glass or a chalkboard, physically made people cringe. And yet within the loud reverberation was plenty of raw human emotion. Fear. Denial. Despair. Agony. It was like a mud-soaked sponge being wrung out—he could tell that the repressed sound, unbecoming of a human, was soaked in all-too-real *human*-ness.

Index looked at Kamijou. He didn't look back at her. "Or...sola?"

"I'll ask you one more time...Did you say you were entrusting her to the Roman Catholic Church, man? I thought she trusted *you*—not the Roman Catholic Church."

"..."

Those words made Kamijou think back.

"—I would like to make certain—you are helping now because you were requested to cooperate by the Anglican Church, yes?"

Why would Orsola Aquinas have been so reluctant to ask him that?

"—That's right..."

Why did she look so relieved at that short statement?

"—So then you are of Anglican descent, not Roman Catholic?"

And she asked again, to make absolutely sure...

"—It's nothing crazy like that. Oh, and just so you know, I don't have any pull with them. I'm from Academy City, after all."

And those words, which he hadn't thought about very hard, made her so relieved...

"—I...see."

Those two words—how much meaning had been packed into them?

She probably had faith until the very end.

Faith that Kamijou Touma was someone she could trust herself to as long as she needed.

"...Shit!"

Kamijou clenched his teeth in anger. He quickly turned in the direction he'd heard the shriek. In hindsight, he should have just gotten her into Academy City even if they risked danger. That was it—that was all he had to do to make her safe!

"Give me a goddamn break. Why the hell did it turn out like this?!"

"Don't panic. It's not like that scream was her dying. The Roman Catholic Church has their own stuff going on—they wouldn't be able to kill Orsola Aquinas right here and now. Actually, I'm completely certain of that."

"What?"

"I mean that if you hurry, you can still save her. But if you misstep here, who knows what will happen? Given the situation, I'm not gonna ask you anymore whether or not you trust us, man. We have our own circumstances, but securing Orsola's safety is the most important thing. So I don't care if you and I remain enemies or not!"

His shout implied that they were in a race against time.

"But just promise me this! That you'll get back Orsola Aquinas from the Roman Catholic Church and take her somewhere neither they nor we can get to her!!"

His eyes were serious.

Serious enough to make Kamijou falter.

And then.

Suddenly, he heard a footstep. He took his eyes from Tatemiya. He turned around to the noise to see two sisters in black approaching, as if parting the darkness in front of them. They must have been from the Roman Catholic Church.

One was tall, and one was short. The taller one was hoisting a wheel, bigger than a small round table, that looked like it came off a carriage. The shorter one had four leather pouches hanging from the belt around her waist. Coins or something must have been inside, because they jingled every time she took a step. The pouches were about softball size, so if they were filled with coins, they would have been as heavy as shot puts.

The taller sister drew an old leather notebook from her sleeve pocket and flipped through its pages; then, after nodding about something, she came over to Kamijou. Perhaps there was a photograph in there.

"You are the outsiders assisting us, yes? We have come to take custody of the imprisoned heretic leader. The enemy of God...Is that him?"

As she spoke, the younger sister moved toward Tatemiya Saiji, seated with rune cards stuck on him, in anticipation of the answer.

The four coin pouches at her hips jingled.

“Hey, wait a second!” called Kamijou, but the short sister didn’t seem to hear.

For a moment, she reached a hand toward Tatemiya but then hesitated, realizing something. She went around him, carefully observing the rune cards attached to him.

Instead, the taller sister stared at Kamijou’s face. “What is it?”

“Before you guys pull out of here, can you let me see Orsola one more time?”

“Unfortunately, I must decline. Though we have secured Sister Orsola’s safety, we cannot call the situation safe just yet, since we don’t know the true state of the enemy forces. In cases such as these, our rules state we must give first priority to the safety of our own personnel. Once we have safely seen her back to Rome, we will send you an invitation.”

A perfect answer—so perfect that he had to frown.

“No, no. I’m not convinced. What was that scream from before, anyway? Wasn’t that Orsola’s voice? Is that the kind of noise that someone who’s made it to safety would make? Anyway, I want to see her again. You don’t mind, right? I just want to see her for a bit, say a few words, and that’s it. We won’t be seeing each other for a while, so I have to at least say good-bye.”

“But our rules state...”

“Ah, jeez! Why are you so annoying about rules? Is Agnese over there? I’ll just go over and ask her myself!”

Kamijou grabbed the tall sister’s shoulder and brusquely pushed her aside.

“...”

She relaxed her shoulders, as if amazed at seeing how much of a worrywart he was.

Then she took the giant wheel against her back and placed it in front of her like a shield with a dull noise.

Index’s face immediately warped with nervousness. “Stop, Touma—?!”

But before she could finish...

The wooden wheel exploded.

“...?!”

For an instant, Kamijou didn't know what happened. Like a shotgun, hundreds of sharp fragments came flying, but only toward him. Once his thought process caught up, he covered his face and chest with both hands. A moment later, the countless splinters hit him right in the hands, legs, and gut. By the time he had begun to feel pain, his feet had already left the ground. As the explosion hit him, he found himself being blown five or six meters back.

Index's clipped shriek reached his ears.

Out of the corner of his eye he could see Tatemiya trying to stand, but he stopped abruptly when a few rune flames singed his hair. He bared his teeth like a chained wild dog. The shorter sister appeared a little shaken up. She looked at the taller sister and asked,

"S-Sister Lucia...Umm, well, i-is this okay...? Didn't...Didn't Sister Agnese tell us to avoid needless contact with our *guests*...?"

"Be quiet, Sister Angeline. Damn, Agnese, this is why we shouldn't have let these heathens slip so close to us—we should have chased them away sooner. We all listened to your optimistic command to leave them be, and this is what happens...," muttered the taller sister to herself as if to calm her own emotions, shooting a glare at the shorter sister to silence her.

Her eyes had changed color. It was an abstract change, but that's what Kamijou thought. The taller sister's eyes had heat enough in them to melt butter into a puddle as she looked at Kamijou.

He was speechless—was this the same kind of nun as the ones who had given him bread and soup at the campsite?

"If only you weren't so weirdly obsessed with a *scream*, then we would have had less to do...Damn, why—why, this heretic, with his hand, on my shoulder, my shoulder, my shoulder. Sister Angeline! Find me the soap—no, the detergent! This is terrible. I am in the worst of moods. They spoke to me. Would you say a few words to them? I simply cannot stand it—I need to wear a mudguard apron or something."

Blood silently rose to the tall sister's face.

Her face wavered to and fro as her mouth produced a monotone voice.

"This is all getting more and more and more complicated. What are we to do? Let us say that the Amakusa member resisted and killed you both. Ah, yes, that seems like the easiest option. After that, we must only seal the Amakusa's lips, and there will be no problems."

The line sounded like an ad-lib correction for a stage play whose scenario had gone awry.

It sounded like a threatening voice, but Kamijou couldn't find it in him to answer.

Quite a few wooden shards had struck him, but they weren't actual blades in the first place, so his wounds were shallow.

But right after that...the slender shards piercing his skin suddenly began twisting up and down by themselves.

"Gh...gaaaaahhhhhhhhhhh?!"

As Kamijou screamed, as though pulling out an ax wedged in a big tree, the fragments began falling out one after another. The blood-splattered fragments returned to the tall sister as if by magnetism, and like a jigsaw puzzle being assembled, they re-formed the original carriage wheel.

"Touma!!" shouted Index, just about to run over to him in a panic.

However, at the sight, the tall sister commanded, "Sister Angeline!"

"Y-yes ma'am!" stammered the short sister in reply, slicing the belt at her waist and throwing the four coin pouches overhead.

With the sound of air hitting a big piece of cloth, six sparrow-like wings came out of each of the pouch openings. The wings shone in different colors for each pouch—red, blue, yellow, and green.

"Viene. Una persona dodici apostli. Lo schiavo basso che rovina rovina un mago mentre e quelli che raccolgono! (Come out, one of the twelve apostles, tax collector and lowly servant of the eradicating magician!)"

The short sister raised both hands overhead as if to embrace the night sky.

At that moment, with the speed of a bullet, the green-winged coin pouch grazed across Index and stabbed into the ground at her feet.

A rattling sound emerged as the hard ground began to form cracks like tree roots.

"This is...?"

Index hastily tried to leap backward, but her body came right back down. She looked to see the drawstring on the coin pouch stuck in the ground was undone. It had wrapped around her ankles and was holding her down. Right when Index cast her gaze down to her feet, the other three pouches fluttered high in the air, aiming right for that new blind spot.

Kamijou paled.

(Oh, crap...! If she hits her with that...!!)

The coin pouches probably weighed more than shot puts. With her feet stuck to the ground, Index wouldn't be able to avoid them, and it would be too much to defend with her hands.

"Shit! Index!!" he shouted, getting ready to run over there.

Fortunately, the coin pouch binding her legs seemed to work on magical principles. It would be easy to punch it with his right hand and undo it.

But then...

"Worry about yourself, child. So that you may avoid as much pain as you can!"

Before he realized it, the taller sister hoisting the giant wheel had jumped above him. Kamijou, unstable and trying to stand up, locked on to the wheel's center point like the muzzle on a gun.

(—?!)

He shuddered and he felt his throat dry up. Punching the wheel and having it be blasted to smithereens clearly presented poor odds for him.

"Heathen child, are you familiar with the Legend of the Wheel?"

The tall sister smiled vacantly.

"Countless Saints have been martyred since long ago. Those foolish people, high in the government, thought to end their lives by execution, but in their history of torture and execution, the wheel appears many times."

Kamijou didn't feel like engaging in small talk, but the wheel before his eyes was preventing him from moving. And meanwhile, the three coin pouches, dozens of meters in the air, turned and dove straight down to Index.

"They were giant wheels, with innumerable nails and blades stabbing into them, made to rip Saints apart. But there are many reports of the wheels exploding on their own when they touched Saints. Yes—Saint George, who exterminated dragons, and even Saint Catherine of the Alexandria. Fragments from the exploding wheels were said to have killed more than four thousand people who were there to watch the execution. The teachings of the Legend of the Wheel are as follows."

Her calm tone fried his nerves even more. The three coin pouches aiming for Index shot like a bullet toward her to smash her head in.

The tall sister viewed Kamijou as he began to sweat in nervousness from the other side of the wheel. She smiled, pleased. “The sinless will not be punished, and the sinful will receive judgment—know this, heretic. There is no salvation for you. Sister Orsola, both our comrade and a fool who must die—we must follow *procedure* for her, but we have no need to hesitate when killing the two of you.”

“Shit...!!”

Thinking he was going to go save Index, he turned and gave his full attention to the bound girl in white. Before his eyes, the wheel began to crack apart. Time slowed—and Kamijou saw the wheel, split into six equal parts at its center like a pizza, begin to expand from within.

“Ga, ahhhhhhhhhh!!”

He clenched his right hand and howled, but he was too late. He wouldn’t make it. Before he thrust out his fist, the giant wheel wielded by the tall sister made an ear-splitting noise...

...And with a loud noise it *bounced sideways*.

Obviously, it wasn’t the tall sister’s intention, nor was it due to Kamijou’s fist.

The coin pouches.

The coin pouch with six red wings, which had been going after Index’s head, had struck the execution wheel from the side with amazing speed. The impact wrenched the wheel from the tall sister’s hands. It bounced on the ground a few times and flew into the darkness. The coin pouch that hit it burst open from the impact, sending unidentifiable coins of all sizes into the air.

The tall sister, suddenly without a weapon, hastily jumped away to put distance between her and Kamijou, then turned a glare on the shorter sister.

“Sister Angeline, have you gone mad?!”

“N-no, no...It wasn’t me!”

Her savagely angry shout made the shorter of them blanch and explain herself, when just then,

“CTRTTOPAO! (Collect the remaining three to one point, and become one!)”

Index’s clear voice *interrupted them*.

That instant.

The roar of metal being pulverized rang out. The green pouch's drawstring came off from Index's ankles. The blue and yellow pouches going for her head instead shot off toward the short sister's face with incredible speed.

The three pouches collided with one another two centimeters from her nose and stopped dead. The extreme force pounded the hundred-some coins into a single metal lump, and it made a dull sound as it fell to the short sister's feet.

The shorter sister fell over on her rear with, strangely enough, a smile.

"The apostle Matthew, who felled two fire-breathing dragons using only a cross and prayer. By passing Telesma through his emblem, the money pouch, one can create a weapon that tracks a target when thrown...," Index criticized, very quietly. "How sloppy. The incantation is long, and its encryption is all over the place. You're so preoccupied with stabilizing your own technique and not paying attention to anything else. It's easy to muscle on into it!"

Kamijou didn't understand what had just happened. Index couldn't use magic, could she? Or was it some other kind of trick? Something to let her interrupt the short sister's magic and hijack it...

"...Self-destruction—friendly fire. A tactic to use the penalty of magical failure against itself."

The taller sister cast her gaze around, then clucked her tongue and readied herself again. Even without a weapon, her will to fight hadn't waned one bit. With gentle movements, she made the sign of the cross...

...but then they heard what sounded like a high-pitched flute tone from far away.

It was like the cry of a bird. The taller sister looked hatefully into the black sky.

"The command to retreat? Sister Angeline!!"

"Ah, uh? B-but we haven't yet dealt with—"

"We are retreating. We can put the Amakusa leftovers down to the English already having let them escape. Ruining the pace of things will badly affect our unit as a whole and could cause harm to befall the group escorting Orsola. That is the larger problem at hand."

The tall sister turned on her heel and disappeared into the darkness, and the short sister followed her in a fluster.

"You get it now, right?" said Tatemiya Saiji sourly, looking up at the night sky.

“That’s how the Roman Catholic Church, the largest Christian denomination in the world, operates behind the scenes.”

Part 2

“I see. So that’s why she looked so stupefied the moment she saw Agnese Sanctis. They probably cut us off from the main Roman Catholic force because they’ve been looking down on us from the start, too. Hmph...Their chain of command would be left in disarray with the Anglican Church there, eh? That’s rich,” said Stiyl at leisure as they left Parallel Sweets Park.

He must have heard Orsola’s scream, too, but he didn’t seem to have asked Agnese about it when he left her. If he hadn’t known the situation and asked her, it could have turned into a diplomatic issue between the two Church organizations. Kamijou understood that, but he wasn’t satisfied with it.

After the little fight, he had run to where Agnese had been, only to find that she and all the others had already withdrawn. And no assassins came up to pursue Tatemiya, either. With so many of his friends captured, maybe they had judged the Amakusa as having already been destroyed.

The fact that they’d had so many people, yet still withdrew cleanly enough to leave no trace of their existence, sent shivers down Kamijou’s spine. The fact that they hadn’t given the Anglican Church any sort of debriefing—or even a good-bye—must have meant they really didn’t trust them at all. Securing Orsola was their primary objective. Maybe they figured that they’d only deal with Tatemiya and the others if they had the time. Or perhaps they would summon their entire force from all over the city and press for a decisive victory.

With all of that, Kamijou, Index, Stiyl, and Tatemiya were busy exchanging information. Kamijou, having been stricken all over his body with those wheel fragments, was wrapped up in bandages in many places.

“Even if everything that man says is true, they’re not going to kill Orsola Aquinas right away. They have their own circumstances to consider...So, Kamijou Touma, don’t you dare go running off somewhere right this moment. If you stand out, things will get pretty complex.”

Kamijou made a dissatisfied face at the warning. “...What do you mean, circumstances to consider?”

“Roman Catholicism is Christianity’s largest denomination, Touma. Most don’t know anything about the occult, but it still has more than two billion followers, the pope still

leads 141 cardinals, and it's still expansive enough that it has churches in 113 countries. It's all well and good that it's big, but if it gets too big, they might start to have problems."

"?"

Kamijou still didn't understand.

This time, Tatemiya spoke up. "Well, in other words, basically...If they have that much influence, they're obviously gonna have a lot of different factions. First off, the pope and the cardinals govern 142 parishes, and depending on the country and region, it's 207—then if you add in clashes between old and young and between male and female, it's 252."

Stiyl blew out a puff of smoke, vexed. "With so many factions, people say the Roman Catholic Church has more enemies within it than outside it. People join up with others over minute problems with their own brethren and poke and prod at them. With all that, the current situation has a *very* delicate aspect to it. The *Book of the Law* is definitely a threat to the Roman Catholic Church, but Orsola Aquinas herself is entirely innocent. If they kill her unreasonably, their brethren around the world would turn against Agnese."

"Is that right? But we didn't do anything wrong, either. And they still came at *us* without a second thought." Kamijou lightly stroked the bandage on his arm with a fingertip. It was already oppressively hot outside—the bandages on him were only making it worse.

"That's because they can use the excuse that we're heretics or pagans. Any idea how much atrocity has been justified by simply saying how it's okay to punish those who disobey God's teachings?"

"That's what the sisters who attacked us before are probably thinking. But I think that's exactly why they can't inadvertently lay a hand on Orsola. Since thou shalt not kill those who believe in the teachings of God."

"..."

Kamijou glanced away and thought about it, gazing at the trees on the roadside illuminated by the streetlights. Even if Roman Catholicism had a rule that stated they couldn't kill other members of the faith, then why did the Amakusa act to prevent Orsola from being assassinated?

He asked the question, and Stiyl answered, not treating it as very important.

"It's easy. There are exceptions."

"Exceptions?"

"That's right. Thou shalt not kill those who believe in the teachings of God—if you subscribe to this rule, then that means it's okay to drive those who don't from the Church and kill them."

His giant sword on full display, Tatemiya continued for Stiyl. Not that it mattered, but Kamijou began to worry how he'd explain himself if the police saw him.

"Criminals, witches, traitors...They cut off all connections with those who break the rules. And at the same time, they label them enemies of God."

"The way they do it is simple. Just test them. Let's see—for example, say there's a metal pole that's so hot it's burning red. They'll make Orsola hold it. If she were innocent, her Lord would protect her, and she wouldn't be burned. But if she was burned, then she would be judged one not worth protecting. It's absurd, isn't it? In the Anglican Church, testing the Lord is treated as a sin."

"But that's...!" Kamijou was dumbfounded. "But of course she'd get burned! It would be weirder if she didn't!"

"You're right. They could find fault with her even if she wasn't burned. They could say she's being protected by the devil. Whichever the result, the one being tested is sure to be labeled."

(That's savage.)

It was absolutely wrong to decide Orsola's fate with such messed-up methods.

"But on the other hand, this inquisition—or trial by ordeal, should I say. Anyway, until they're finished preparing to exile her, they can't take her life without due caution. If they follow proper procedure, they will go back to Rome first, and then it would take two or three days to get it ready. Still, anything they do will probably be overlooked as long as they don't kill her."

The Roman Catholic Church couldn't care less about what she was thinking or the feelings with which she was trying to stand up to the grimoire's original copy. Because it was a nuisance. Because it was inconvenient. Because it was a pain. Because it wouldn't go well. Because it would make trouble. That was all it took for them to go after Orsola's life.

Even though they should have been the same.

Even though Orsola and the Roman Catholic Church must have had the same opinions deep down.

Even though both of them saw the *Book of the Law* as dangerous and were acting because they wanted to do something about it.

Even though she was looking for a breakthrough, a way to dispose of the original copies of grimoires, which were said to be indestructible by human hands, despite the fact that they could decipher them.

Even though she just wanted to be useful.

Even though she thought the book was dangerous and wanted to do something about it.

"—Do you know about the original copies of grimoires? Or how they cannot be destroyed by any means?"

Was that really such a bad thing?

"—With current technology, it is impossible to get rid of grimoires that have reached this state. The most that can be done is to seal it so that nobody may ever read it."

Had Orsola Aquinas done something so wrong...

"—That is, with current technology."

...That she needed to go through someone else's procedure, be labeled a heretic, remain silent instead of asking for someone's help, and be executed?

"—One should be able to use the magic circle against itself—in other words, to force the original text to destroy itself."

No.

"—The power of grimoires doesn't bring anyone happiness. The only thing they create is conflict. That's why I was investigating its inner workings—in order to destroy these kinds of grimoires."

No!

"Like hell I'll accept that..." Kamijou clenched his teeth so hard they might break. "Even if they had that kind of reason, no matter what circumstances they have, that shit isn't okay! Seriously, what the hell?! What do they think human life is? Taking away everything important to a person, bit by bit—what the hell do they think human life is?!"

Kamijou Touma had lost his memories.

So there were very few things he thought were very important. He only had a month's worth of memories from summer vacation in the first place. Compared to high school students with normal lives, he had but a fraction of things important to him. And most of what he had were messy memories borne from lying about his memory loss.

But Kamijou still felt as though...Even he, with such a scant number of things he could call precious—if someone were to come and steal them away as simply as crossing something out in a document with red ink, he would be angry beyond description.

Maybe those in the Roman Catholic Church really were fighting to protect something precious to them. But they shouldn't be doing it.

Like a flock of crows pecking at somebody—stripping away everything someone held dear, one by one, *robbing* them—that was something that should never be done.

Why didn't they look for another way?

Why did the cheap, foolish method of killing her satisfy them?

Kamijou clenched his fists so tightly he thought they might bleed. The lights on the street, dotting the dark residential area at night, coldly illuminated them.

"...Where are they right now? Do you know anything?"

"I've got a good idea. But what do you plan on doing once I tell you?" answered Stiyl in an aloof way—and it made Kamijou want to grab his collar.

(How the hell can this guy stay so calm?)

His face looked like he was going to devour Stiyl, but the priest didn't seem disturbed at all. The cigarette in the corner of his mouth wiggled. In fact, Index, whom he couldn't see, seemed to be the one who was scared.

"I understand how you feel." Stiyl quietly exhaled smoke. "But how about we calm down a bit first, hm? There are close to 250 of the ladies just in this one town, remember? Remind me—would your fist be convenient enough to wipe them all out?"

"...!!"

Kamijou gripped his own fists.

Yes, he knew that. His skill was only good for fights in back alleys. He could only beat people one on one. One on two was pretty risky, and one on three would end up with him getting beaten to a pulp. And while it may have been a sneak attack, that sister had just overwhelmed him by attacking with that wheel.

Barehanded fights in real life weren't like in the movies—one person couldn't beat dozens of opponents by himself in a fair fight. No matter how strong the person was, there was a strict rule to the effect that you couldn't possibly win given a certain number of people surrounding you.

And that...

...Was if you weren't the kind of real combat professional you saw in manga and dramas.

The magician—who should have been one of those combat professionals—blew out a little smoke, grinning comfortably.

"If the Amakusa's story is all true, then we don't have anything to do at this point in the first place. Unfortunately, this story is already over."

"What...was that?"

"Just think about it, all right? Orsola Aquinas broke the Roman Catholic Church's rules, and now they're after her life. Agnese Sanctis followed her to punish her for breaking the rules. That's really all this incident was, wasn't it? The *Book of the Law*'s original copy is apparently safe at home in the Vatican Library. Given their position, they can't allow it to be used for evil. The Amakusa's saying they don't plan on using it for evil, either. In the end, nothing has happened that would change what we Anglicans have to do. I'm not happy we didn't get to say good-bye now that everything's over with, but it's nothing getting so red-faced over will do anything about, is it?"

This time for sure...

This time, Kamijou Touma grabbed Stiyl Magnus's collar without a second thought. Index covered her mouth and let out a yelp as Tatemiya looked at him and gave a whistle.

But still, the runic magician wasn't disturbed in the slightest. In the deserted night streets, his words echoed, alone, and disappeared. The flickering streetlights intermittently cast their shine on the priest.

"This is no more than the Roman Catholic Church judging an internal incident by its own rules. As long as it doesn't affect anyone else, if the Anglican Church foolishly complained about it, then it would be seen as a political intervention—it could even do great harm to relations between the English and the Romans...Unfortunately, it's time to give up on this, Kamijou Touma. Or do you want to save her even if you start a war?"

"...That's..."

"Whether it's Anglicanism or Roman Catholicism, don't go thinking everyone who's part of them are combat personnel like we are. In fact, most of them are people just like you. They go to school, spend time with friends, eat hamburgers on the way home—that's their whole world to them. They don't know about the magicians lurking in the shadows, nor do they notice all the deals made among various groups to keep a magical war from occurring. They are truly virtuous, powerless lambs."

Then, the magician, with Kamijou still holding on to his collar, asked coolly.

It was indeed as though he were a demon urging him to an agreement.

“Now this is the problem—can you wrap them up in this? Do you *want* to get people, ignorant of the truth, who are part of these religions involved in this, rob them, kill them, take everything they have, just so you can protect Orsola Aquinas?”

“...”

The strength in the hands Kamijou was grabbing Stiyl’s collar with faded. Index tried to say something, but she didn’t know what, so she just took a long breath.

This was the difference between amateurs and professionals.

This was the difference between individuals and organizations.

Stiyl spat out his cigarette tiredly, crushed it with his foot, and turned to look at Tatemiya. “I don’t have the right to stop *you* from doing anything, though. You can fight all you want for Orsola, since she asked, or your subordinates, or whatever you want. But if you’re going, then you’re doing it alone. If you try to get the Anglican Church involved in this, they will turn this entire island nation into scorched earth to uproot and massacre the Amakusa Church,” threatened Stiyl—but Tatemiya’s expression didn’t change.

“Man, I know that much. Oh, come on, kid. Don’t get so down. The Anglican Church might not have any reason to fight, but we’ve got a big one. I’m just gonna pay a visit to their little hideout, rescue my allies, and maybe give Orsola a lift while I’m at it. What? We’re used to throwing a few talented people at stupidly huge groups. Our sect evolved by opposing the Tokugawa Shogunate, after all.”

Kamijou brought his head up at what he said.

Index, next to him, looked at Tatemiya’s face.

“You’re going to call the rest of your friends from the Amakusa’s main base? But you’ll have to wait another day to use the special movement method, and if you wait that long, the Romans might go back home.”

“Yeah. Can’t take the safe option in this situation,” said Tatemiya, swinging his white sword a bit.

Stiyl said in an uninterested voice, “Are you saying you’re going alone?”

“There’s no other choice, so I need to. Fortunately though, those idiots may have gotten taken away, but they haven’t been executed...If they wanted to kill us, they wouldn’t have bothered capturing us—they would have just cut us down on the spot. It’d be more realistic for them to deliver a sentence to us with Orsola, saying that she conspired with the Amakusa Church to steal the *Book of the Law*. So if I break ‘em out and incite things the right way, we might actually have a chance of barely winning.” Tatemiya concealed his tension with a jovial expression. “The best time to go at them is when they’re on the

move." He waved his giant sword around. "The Amakusa's been pursued for a long time—we're pretty familiar with how scary and fragile groups can be. A large group of people is at its weakest when it's on the move. After all, the Roman Catholics captured more than three hundred Amakusa members, y'know? They can't move around properly with only the nuns they have. If hundreds of sisters dressed in black went on parade through the city together, they could end up on TV as a demonstration or a riot or somethin'.

"So they're gonna have some kind of camouflage for when they move, just in case. Like splitting into smaller groups and going by car. It's an established tactic—when they're camouflaging themselves, they can't use the full extent of their power, making it the best—and only—time to launch a surprise attack."

From what Tatemiya was saying, the Roman Catholic Church wouldn't use magic to move like the Amakusa did. And it was too late at night for them to charter a boat or plane. Their exodus would probably wait to begin until morning, when the harbors and airports opened up.

"..."

Their moving was the greatest opportunity.

But that also meant they couldn't do anything until they started moving, too. Stiyl said that in order for the Roman Catholic Church to erase Orsola, they needed to follow a procedure called an inquisition.

But on top of that, it meant that until they killed her, they could do anything they wanted and it would be overlooked.

Violence, inflicted by a surrounding group of two hundred and fifty people. In a way, that could be more terrifying than a punishment based on proper rules. After all, it wasn't clearly defined in their laws—there wasn't a clear line between how much was okay and how much wasn't.

Could they do anything to her as long as she didn't die?

Would they say she was lucky, no matter what they did to her, just because she was breathing?

Kamijou's face clouded over, and Tatemiya seemed to suspect his apprehensions. "...Might be a bit cruel to tell you to understand. Even we've got things we know we can and can't do."

His words were mixed with bitterness. A professional like him could probably imagine things more vividly than an amateur like Kamijou. About how the Roman Catholics treated captured enemies.

Kamijou Touma punched a nearby telephone pole with all his might.

Despite being able to visualize the worst possible situation, he couldn't take any action whatsoever—and he felt ashamed to no end for it.

Stiyl disinterestedly looked at Kamijou, who was unable to make any sort of reply, and said, "Looks like that settles it. We should split up and hide as well. Guess I'll give the higher-ups a ring and ask what to do next. Our problems with the Roman Catholic Church and the Amakusa Church have been cleared up, but I'll need to do something about Kanzaki now. Kamijou Touma, you take Index back to Academy City. Right now, having gotten their hands on the most important person, Orsola, the Roman Catholics wouldn't consider attacking you two outsiders, since it would mean picking a fight with the science side."

He lit a new cigarette. "Well, if the Anglican Church at least had a proper reason to rescue Orsola Aquinas, it would be a different story—but this is all we can do." He blew out smoke, sounding thoroughly uninterested. "Right. Also, Kamijou Touma. There was something I wanted to ask."

"...What?"

He turned around, exhausted. Stiyl continued, giving a cynical smile. "That cross I gave you before. You don't seem to have it on you—where'd you put it?"

"..." Kamijou thought for a moment, then remembered. "Sorry. I gave it to Orsola. She seemed really happy I put it around her neck, though. Was it really that valuable?"

"No, it was an entirely normal iron cross. They're probably souvenirs produced en masse by some factory. They're all over England—it's the cross of Saint George, which is also part of our nation's flag." Stiyl grinned for some reason, seeming a bit pleased. "That cross has no value as an ornament or an antique. The thing had value while you were carrying it...but whatever. You don't need it anymore anyway," said Stiyl cryptically, blowing out another puff of smoke.

Without knowing what he meant by that, Kamijou withdrew to the dark road.

And thus the curtains fell on a disappointing ending to a disappointing incident.

Part 3

Tatemiya Saiji was gone.

Stiyl seemed to want to guard Index until she safely got into Academy City. She was next to Kamijou, who was trudging down the night road, but seemed to be at a loss for words.

This may have been the capital of Japan, but when you got away from the center, it was veiled in the dark of night. Checking the time revealed it was past one in the morning, and most of the city lights were out. A few apartment complexes had lights in their windows here and there like missing teeth, and sometimes a taxi with someone drunk in it would pass by. The streetlights kept on flickering unreliably, illuminating the many moths gathering to them.

Their unexpected day revolving around fighting was already over. In just a few hours, he would be going back to his normal life, centered around school. Kamijou would shake the lack of sleep from his head, go to school, take some boring classes, talk about dumb stuff to Tsuchimikado and Aogami Pierce on the way home, and be on the receiving end of Mikoto's electricity for not completing his summer homework after all.

"...What should I have done?" he said suddenly.

Index looked up at him, but he was still looking down, dejected.

He wanted to save Orsola Aquinas.

But he couldn't think of any way to do that.

"I get that an amateur can't think of a way to beat a professional. But I still think maybe there was something even an amateur could have done. Like when I first met Orsola, if I had just taken her to Academy City like she asked—what would have happened then? And if we didn't help the Roman Catholic Church, maybe she could have gotten away with the Amakusa and their special movement method."

"Touma..."

"No, I get it. Those things only seem hopeful because I'm not looking at their end results. Even if Orsola got into Academy City, the Roman Catholic Church would have given chase and followed her in. Even if we didn't help them, they would have used their human wave tactics, searched every nook and cranny, and found where the Amakusa was gathering. I get all that, but still..."

He thought back.

Back to when he first met Orsola. That uneasy voice asking him to tell her how to get into Academy City. Her smile when they were hiding out in the theme park.

Her words, spoken strangely readily, as though she thought she'd finally found someone she could trust.

And last of all—that shriek of despair they had heard from somewhere.

"But really...what should we have done?"

He knew that just thinking like this was the act of an amateur who didn't fully grasp the dangers. This incident had nothing to do with him. A simple high school student had chanced a glimpse at how harsh the world of professional magicians were, and now he was going back to his own world. No one would blame him for it. Anyone who knew firsthand how terrifying the real world of magic was would probably breathe a sigh of relief upon seeing his safe return.

Stiyl must have thought he'd finished explaining everything he needed to, so he didn't say even a word despite hearing Kamijou's complaints.

On the other hand, Index looked up into Kamijou's face. "...Touma. This is a problem for magicians, so you don't need to get yourself involved. I can't say much, since I can't do anything anyway, but Tatemiya Saiji said he'd do it, so I think we just have to trust him..."

"...Right."

Index looked about to cry at Kamijou's unfocused response. "That's right! Touma, there's no rule saying you have to settle every problem magicians have! I think if anyone, you should blame me, the anti-magic expert, for not being able to do anything. But the problems that can be solved will be solved even if you're not there. Touma, I think you've gotten involved with a lot of magicians, for an outsider. But there are a whole lot of magicians in the world you don't know, and they all have their own problems, and they figure them out without needing to borrow your strength. This time is the same—it's just that this is the first time you've seen an incident you weren't involved in ending."

"Is that right?" Kamijou answered mechanically—but he was surprised on the inside.

She should be able to imagine what fate awaited Orsola, too—but she had firmly told him not to get involved with this incident anymore.

Or maybe it was backward. If she made a contradictory statement, then maybe Kamijou wouldn't praise her anymore.

"Yeah. Things have been weird until now. No one can solve every problem they see by themselves. Touma, you can ask people for help. You can trust other people with the endings. Just because you see a house on fire and there's a little kid still inside, there's no reason you have to jump in. Calling for help in that situation isn't shameful at all," Index said. "Touma, I think you should rely on other people more. We're from Necessarius—that's what it was made for. No one will blame you just because you couldn't solve a problem yourself that even an organization like ours is having trouble with."

"..."

It just so happened that he didn't have a place in this, in the end. Maybe that's all it was. Just because his part was over didn't mean the incident suddenly ended there. Maybe Tatemiya Saiji would just take up the mantle of protagonist from here and settle things.

She was right—just because a random attacker incident happened right in front of him, there was no rule saying that witnesses needed to resolve it. Nobody would blame the witnesses for the police arresting the criminal.

"I wonder if Tatemiya can do it."

"I think he has a chance at winning. He's a real magician, after all. The Amakusa Church has a particularly harsh history of oppression—these sorts of odds we're facing are their specialty. They wouldn't take on an enemy they couldn't beat."

Kamijou nodded.

He thought to himself—this was enough. He thought to himself—if they'd resolve this incident without him forcing himself to fight, then there was no need for an amateur to butt in. That was a normal idea. A clueless amateur doing as he pleased and throwing things into confusion could trigger everything going in an even worse direction—so not getting involved instead seemed like a good plan in its own right.

There was no rule saying he had to resolve every incident.

In fact, if he took a step back, there were plenty more incidents resolved without Kamijou's help.

He didn't need to worry about having gotten a glimpse of one of them.

Even without his involvement, someone would take it upon themselves to close the curtains on it.

He looked up into the night sky and slowly stretched both of his hands into the air. Suddenly growing aware of all his pent-up exhaustion, he finally started to yearn for the futon in his dorm.

"Guess we'll go home," said Kamijou aloud—as if to draw a clear line between his normal and abnormal lives. "Oh, right. Before we go back, I want to drop by a store. Supermarkets and department stores won't be open this late, so it'll have to be a convenience store. The fridge is empty, so I figured I'd go and buy a bunch of stuff...but whatever. I want to see what places outside Academy City have—maybe they've got bento they don't sell on the inside."

"...Touma. I think I'm suddenly really tired of domestic life."

“Well, sorry. I’m just a boring high school kid who thinks it’s fun to have a household account book now, that’s all.”

“I want to eat luxurious meals without having to worry about your account book once in a while.”

“If you don’t like it, fine. But tomorrow’s breakfast will be an empty plate with some water. You’ll have to make up for the rest with that active imagination of yours.”

“Touma?!” shouted Index, despite it being night.

Kamijou looked at the girl devourer as her face paled at such a simple thought and grinned. “Then why don’t I go hit a convenience store and find some breakfast for tomorrow?”

“Huh? If you’re going to the ‘store,’ then maybe we should all go.”

“If I brought you, I wouldn’t be able to shop—you’d throw everything within reach into the basket. All right, I won’t be long. Stiyl, could you bring Index back to Academy City ahead of me? You brought us out, so you can sneak back in, I’m sure...Actually, er, if you did that might be a problem in its own right...”

“If you say so. Your suggestion benefits her—so I don’t mind...”

Stiyl wiggled the cigarette in the corner of his mouth up and down. “By the way, you know where it is?”

“...No, but...Convenience stores are everywhere—I’ll just run around here for a bit.”

“Fine.” Stiyl grinned sardonically, disappearing into the dark night escorting Index. Index wanted to stay with Kamijou, but he waved his arms and refused.

He waited until he could no longer see them, then turned right around.

Right around—to return straight along the road he’d come.

“That asshole. Did he know...?” said Kamijou to himself, annoyed.

(My wallet’s still in the dorm, after all. Wouldn’t be able to do much in a convenience store.)

As he walked, he took out his cell phone from his pants pocket. Its white backlight cast a dim light on his face. He pressed a few buttons and, using his GPS service, started searching around on a map. He wasn’t, of course, looking for a nearby store.

Kamijou Touma remembered Agnese Sanctis’s words.

"—It is our privilege to outnumber all. We have comrades in 110 countries around the world, after all. There are many churches even in Japan. In fact, a new house of the lord is being constructed as we speak—the Church of Orsola. I think it was somewhere around here, actually. Right nearby. I think they were bragging that when it was finished, it would be the largest church in Japan. It was supposedly as big as a baseball stadium."

Academy City's GPS was extremely accurate and updated frequently. There were even rumors it was precise enough to be used for military purposes. It displayed the newest buildings, of course, but also every single planned construction. In contrast, that meant that places like the Hakumeiza site were quickly erased from the map.

Of course, the names of planned buildings weren't listed on GPS maps—all it said was "planned site." But he could tell just by looking at the picture. He could only find one planned construction site giant enough to rival a baseball stadium.

"—Yes. She has quite a record, you know. She has spread the teachings of God to three heretic nations, earning her the special privilege to have a church built in her name. She was very good at speaking, wasn't she?"

He quickened his pace as he looked at his cell phone screen. Just as she said, the Church of Orsola—the base of the Roman Catholic Church—was in this town. Moving around with lots of people was a weakness of group action. If they wanted to lessen the risk at all, making the Church of Orsola—which was right around the corner—into a fortress would be logical. And they'd use magic Kamijou didn't know of, whether the building was under construction or not.

The Roman Catholic Church's members had to be there.

Including Agnese Sanctis—and Orsola Aquinas.

"—Once the church is finished, we'll send you some invitations. But before that, we should settle the issue at hand. Let's pray for a splendid conclusion with a good aftertaste."

He recalled Agnese's joke and chuckled.

"They haven't even finished getting ready for the party or addressing the invitations...but let's go crash it anyway."

With his destination clearly in mind, he didn't need to stand around.

He began moving even faster—and when he next realized it, he was dashing along the night roads.

He didn't have any reason to fight.

He didn't have to fight to know that someone else would settle everything by themselves.

Just because there was a burning building in front of him with a young child trapped inside didn't mean there was a rule saying Kamijou had to jump in there—that's what Index had said.

Asking someone else for help and leaving it to them wasn't a bad thing, she said.

But still...

If that child in that burning house was waiting this whole time for Kamijou to come save her, then what?

The wisest choice, obviously, would be to get in touch with the fire department as soon as possible.

But Kamijou didn't want to show his back to that child even by accident. Even if that was the safest and easiest choice for him to make, he didn't want to betray that faith.

Did Orsola Aquinas still have faith in Kamijou Touma?

Despite all the foolish choices he'd made, did she still trust him like a child would?

Fortunately for him, he had no connections with any specific organizations like the Anglican Church or the Roman Catholic Church. He was never anything more than a student and an amateur, so nothing bound him. He couldn't ask for the help of professionals like Index or Stiyl, but there was instead something only an amateur could do.

His one misgiving was that he could be seen as a member of the science faction of Academy City, but if things really got dangerous, said organization would probably just expel him, erase him from the register, and treat him as though he had never been a part of it.

But Kamijou didn't care about that.

In fact, he had to laugh at himself for feeling like he wanted to choose this path.

Without a reason to fight, the boy ran through the night.

In reality, there wasn't a single reason he had to make himself fight...

...But he had a reason he *wanted* to fight, all the same.

Part 4

Despite it being called the Church of Orsola, you couldn't call the building a church yet. It was about as big as four or five average school gymnasiums put together. Once it was finished, it would be a genuine cathedral, the likes of which had never been seen before in Japan. And placing it a stone's throw away from Academy City also implied a diversion against the science side. But right now, the construction site's size was all it had going for it—inside, it bore nothing but a sense of desolation.

The outer walls of the church had just been finished, but there were metal scaffolds and ladders left alone nearby. As for its interior design, nothing had been done yet—it actually looked like a barbaric band of mercenaries had taken over the place. The windows were gaping open, stained glass planned to be fitted into them. In the planned location for the giant pipe organ, too, only an unnatural space lurked. The marble flooring and walls shined, brand-new, but on the other hand, on the wall behind the pulpit, there was a big cross standing up casually against the wall, originally planned to be hung on it.

But those things couldn't create such an eerie environment on their own.

Inside the cathedral, without any man-made lights, lit up only by the faint moonlight shining through the black holes without any glass, hundreds of sisters all wearing black, as if drenched in darkness, stood silently. They formed a ring surrounding something—and that ring was many layers thick. In their hands were obvious weapons like swords and spears, as well as religious ritual instruments such as giant cogwheels and claws. They all sparkled when the faint moonlight struck them. There were no other people there. The captured Amakusa members were on the same site, but in a different location, bound and under guard by about ten people.

The sisters' attention was not directed outside the building.

Their eyes were focused on the circular space inside their ring.

They heard a punch.

They heard a stifled scream.

"Come on, don't make things difficult, yes? Unfortunately, everyone here is quite busy, myself included. We don't have time to go along with your little games. Just accept the death penalty already, will ya—hey, are you listening to me? I asked if you're fucking listening to me! Answer me!!"

The sound of heavy fabric being kicked.

And with it, an otherworldly scream cut through the dark.

“Hah!! That’s a nice scream you got there. Don’t you think it’s disgraceful? Like you’ve abandoned your womanhood? Ah, shit, looks like we’ll have to rename this church, won’t we? Naming it after a pig or an ass would be simply laughable!”

Orsola Aquinas didn’t answer.

She was on the floor, beaten to a pulp. Her clothing was torn, as though she’d been dragged around while tied to a horse. Its fasteners were broken as well, and large pieces of fabric had been ripped off.

Agnese and the others weren’t using any special magic to make Orsola suffer. They were simply kicking her in the limbs and the gut—and, given enough blows, it would create intense pain. Violence performed by more than two hundred people, even going easy on her, had still driven Orsola to the brink of death. After all, even if each person struck her once, that was two hundred strikes. It was the same as water dripping from the roof creating a hole. Orsola’s limbs, sprawled out on the floor, showed no sign of any movement.

Orsola’s leg, sprawled out on the floor and unmoving—Agnese stepped on it casually. Her thick soles applied pressure like a vise. She yelped.

“I mean, it’s not like I don’t understand why you’d run away. I know your fate—and you might be happier dying here. Inquisitions, attended by all the cardinals...Do you know what they’re like? Ah-ha-ha! They might try to be way serious, but they’re monsters. With that, it still can’t match where it came from—England. If you want my opinion, ours are like playing pretend compared to theirs, you know. Hah, ha-ha! That old man still can’t stop playing house—what a wonderful fate you have, to be pulled along by them and die! Isn’t it?!”

“—?!”

Because of the intense, grinding pain in her leg, Orsola couldn’t manage a proper answer. She also felt like if she opened her mouth carelessly, she would bite her own tongue.

Orsola wondered how things came to this.

The *Book of the Law*’s original copy was a hindrance and an evil to all. Everyone wanted to burn it. It led all who acquired it to a ruinous end—it was literally *li libro di un modo pericoloso*. But human hands could not dispose of the original. They could only take temporary measures, locking it tight with a seal.

Orsola Aquinas wanted to do something about that.

Both she and the Roman Catholic Church must have had the same feelings regarding wanting to erase the infamous *Book of the Law*.

So then why?

What changed to part their paths so definitively?

Right up until the very end, she thought she could see salvation.

Why did that boy hand her over to Agnese?

“Still, it looks like you’ve got a lot less friends to rely on now, eh? To think you’d come here looking for help from the Amakusa, of all people!”

Agnese Sanctis looked down at Orsola.

Her expression looked like it was enchanted by a suspicious grimoire as she kicked Orsola’s calves. The storm of pain resounded in her bones and threatened to tear her mind apart.

“Driven to the brink of death, you finally clung to a bunch of Asians you didn’t know in some filthy island nation. Ah-ha-ha-ha! You mustn’t do that, you know. You can’t hope for anything from piglets who don’t even read scripture. Under our rules, marrying someone outside of a baptized Roman Catholic is equivalent to sodomy—you know that. Did you think it would be fine just as long as they were still Christians? The Amakusa, the Anglicans—it’s ridiculous they’d even call themselves Christians. They are not human. They are pigs and asses. Look where trusting your precious life to people like them got you. Jeez, tricking beasts like them really is too easy. Just tame them a little, and they’ll bring rats back to you in their mouths!”

“...Tr...tricked?”

Orsola’s awareness, hazy with pain until then, slowly turned back outward.

“Those people...Did you...Did you trick...them...?”

The sticky blood falling from her torn lips hindered her speech.

But that didn’t stop her from asking.

“They weren’t...co...cooperating...with you...You tricked...them...?”

“What does it matter? Whichever it was, we got our hands on you, didn’t we? Heh-heh, a-ha-ha!! Man, it was great! Comedy gold! They were all like, ‘We’ll rescue Orsola Aquinas from the evil Amakusa for sure!!’ How moronic, right?! They delivered someone they should’ve been protecting straight into the hands of their enemy! They’re hopeless, that’s what they are!!”

“...”

Orsola's face lost a little bit of its tension.

They hadn't intended to sell her out to the Roman Catholic Church—that wasn't it at all. Their smiles, their words—none of them had been a lie. They earnestly worried about her and came all the way to such a dangerous battlefield just to rescue her.

Even though it had ended in failure...

Even though their efforts were for naught, and her life was threatened instead...

They stayed her allies until the very end. They never once betrayed her, forsook her. They had fought for her until the last moment—those kind, reliable allies.

"The hell are you smiling for?"

"I...see. I...am smiling...am I?" said Orsola in a slow, gentle voice. "I seem...to have realized it. Realized the true colors...of our Roman Catholic Church..."

"Eh?"

"Those people...They act on faith...They believe in others, believe in their feelings, and would follow them anywhere...for others. And yet we...How ugly we are. We...can only act...on doubt. You fooled those helping you, to execute me...You'll fool the people with a fixed trial...and even fool yourself into thinking it's what God wishes you to do..."

"—"

"Although...I'm not in a position to argue with it...either. If I had but trusted the Amakusa...from the start...things wouldn't have gotten this bad. If I had fled with them by their plan...then those in the Amakusa wouldn't have faced danger, either...In the end, this unsightly form of ours...Is this what the Roman Catholic Church...really is?"

Orsola smiled.

With her beaten-up face, and without a hint of humor.

"...I can no longer...escape from your clutches. And just as you planned...I will be judged a false sinner...and be buried in the dark. But I am fine with that now...—For I cannot lie to myself...! And what's more...I absolutely, absolutely cannot...trick those who lent me their strength without expecting anything in return, can I? Never again...do I want to be called the same kind of person as you..."

"The words of a martyr. You expect to be canonized or something?"

With the lightness of kicking an empty can, Agnese's sole came down on Orsola's leg.

“If you want to die that badly, then be my guest. It’ll be easier for us if you don’t resist, after all. Curse those fools for causing this to happen to you as much as you please, and then die!”

Although Agnese would have known there was no way for her to resist. More than two hundred sisters surrounded her, waiting. And there was a strong barrier put up around the church, so she definitely couldn’t make a run for it.

Her consciousness wavering, even Agnese’s words, spoken right next to her ears, only came in bits and pieces. But Orsola still managed to think with her near-disabled mind.

“What...on earth...should I curse?”

“Wh...what?”

“They never...had a reason to fight. I asked him, and he said he wasn’t a Roman Catholic...or an Anglican...He was just a boy. And yet, without any power or reason, he came running to me, a complete stranger...See? Where else in the world...could you find a more attractive gift than that...? Those people...they gave me such a beautiful gift...so what are you saying I should curse about them?”

Yes—she wouldn’t curse them.

She would never curse them.

Even if they hadn’t rescued Orsola safely, what they did couldn’t be condemned. Because they had no duty telling them they needed to rescue her. They weren’t fighting just because someone told them to. They flung themselves into battle, not bothering to use their “rights” to save her.

Just fighting for her, just standing up for her, was worthy of much gratitude.

So Orsola would never curse them.

She felt proud to have been blessed with the chance to meet people who would do so much for a total stranger. She wanted to thank God for making her lucky enough to be with them at the end.

She was satisfied.

That was enough.

Orsola Aquinas thought she would never again embrace such happiness with her hands...

...And yet that happiness hadn’t ended.

For the next moment...

Came a sound as the barrier around the church was destroyed.

Agnese reflexively took her eyes away from Orsola.

Something had happened that forced her to do so.

“It...broke...? Could it be...? Hey! Someone check on the Protection of Giles we put on that door! And scout for enemies! Shit, what group could this be? No one person could have possibly broken a barrier of that level. What enemy faction could be attacking us...?!”

Commands, issued in rapid succession.

But before any of them could be carried out, she got the answer she wanted.

“Ah...” Orsola Aquinas looked.

The oaken double doors at the entrance to the church were thrown open. And there someone stood, like a rough storybook scene where the prince comes to save his princess.

The one standing there was just a boy.

It was an ordinary young man—and yet he neither fled nor ran.

Who was he here for?

What was he here for?

The two-hundred-strong sisters surrounding Orsola turned their harsh glares on the boy but didn’t make a sound. There were already hundreds of people to cause violence against him, and none of them was normal, either. He had to have felt fear. There was no way he didn’t. He was no more than an utterly average young man—so he must have been scared.

And yet.

And yet, without hesitation, he took a step.

A step into the church veiled in darkness, in order to save Orsola Aquinas.

He took the step...for her.

As if to declare that everything would be all right.

Part 5

Kamijou Touma set foot into the huge, unfinished church.

It was a terrible place.

Hundreds of people were gathered here with no air conditioner on this sultry night—it may have been huge, but it felt like a secret room, wrapped in a strange heat. The thick smell of sweat drifted from the darkness, giving it the impression of a deep, giant nesting hole.

Hundreds of sisters dressed in black, blending with the darkness, eddying about.

He saw one girl on the floor in the middle of them, and his eyes narrowed without a sound.

Then he heard a derisive laugh that seemed to know what he was feeling.

He looked toward its source to see Agnese Sanctis for what seemed like the first time.

"You know, I did think it was quite strange." She giggled and broke into a smile. "Why did some total amateur like you, not even a magician, get brought out to the battlefield as a guest?...I don't know what logic went into that one, but I suppose you must hold some absolute power over barriers."

"..."

"Oh my, what's the matter? Did you lose something? Did you want a reward? Oh, well, if you're still attached to that *thing* over there, I can strip her bare for you if you want."

Her voice was tinged with irritation and enthusiasm. It was a joy not unlike having drunk bad alcohol.

"Just one question. You're not gonna lie anymore, are you?"

"Lie? About what?! Can't you tell what's happening here? Who is the greater, and who is the lesser? You can't possibly be stupid enough to think you can stand on the same stage as me, do you? Now, I want to hear your choice from you—what will you do when faced with this many people?"

Just one versus more than two hundred certainly didn't present very good odds. If Kamijou fought them all head-on, he stood no chance. Agnese knew that, too. She casually walked right up to him, without any caution, as if to provoke him.

She thought that Kamijou could never strike her. If he threw even one punch, that punch would mark the beginning of a hopeless battle.

“Sheesh. You’re an idiot—and a big one, at that. I thought the Anglican Church made the wise choice and ran home—but what about you? Hmm. Well, whatever. You can’t do anything by yourself, so if you want to run away, I’ll let you do so. See? I’m giving you one last chance. You know exactly what you need to do, don’t you?”

Kamijou smiled feebly at Agnese Sanctis’s relaxed words.

“My last chance...I know exactly what I need to do, huh?”

And then, in a voice that sounded somehow relieved, he replied.

“You’re right. This is my last chance, that’s for sure. I completely understand.”

Kamijou’s right fist tore through the air.

Agnese immediately crossed her arms to defend her face, but her legs came off the floor.

Her entire body flung away despite her guard, and she glared at Kamijou with eyes like a mad dog.

Not even one second of hesitation.

Without even showing a moment of indecision, the young man showed his preparation to the enemy before him.

“You...little...What the fuck are you doing?!” Agnese Sanctis yelled angrily, but Kamijou Touma replied with an even louder roar.

“What I need to do! Don’t take me so lightly! I’m here to save her! Why the hell else would I be here?!”

Their emotions clashed against each other at close range.

Though they were both, in a word, “heated,” their properties and temperature were entirely different.

Her cheek muscles trembled oddly and she began muttering to herself. The sisters in black, who had been standing idly until now, all turned to face Kamijou Touma. The hundreds of weapons they held made an eerie, mechanical sound, like soldiers marching forward.

“You...That’s...pretty...funny.” Agnese’s voice and body both trembled. “There are two hundred of us. How much can you do alone in this situation?! Come on, then, show me! Ha-ha—with the number difference, I think you’ll be mincemeat in less than a minute, though!”

The sisters in black all readied their weapons at her assertion.

Meanwhile, Kamijou Touma had no weapons—only his own tightly clenched fist.

Just before the two sides clashed...

Suddenly, they heard a voice.

“Give me a break. Don’t start without me. You managed to slip right through the barrier. You could have at least given me enough time to set up the runes we need.”

“Eh...?”

The very moment Agnese turned around with a dumbfounded look, there was a roar of flames sucking in oxygen—and with it, the orange explosion instantly dissolved the darkness dominating the incomplete church.

In the back of the church, exactly opposite where Kamijou stood—

There was a big hole in one of the windows on the wall behind the pulpit, about two stories up, waiting for stained glass to be fitted inside. He’d probably used the scaffolding on the outer wall to get there. Standing in the window frame was an Anglican priest, with a flame sword in his hand.

“...S...Stiyl?”

In a daze, Kamijou Touma whispered the name of the priest with the cigarette in the corner of his mouth.

“We magicians were all ready to finish things up, so we’d planned to have the *amateur* retire. All those fake explanations and fake persuasions—for nothing.”

Agnese spoke before Kamijou could. “...Anglicans? Absurd...This is solely a Roman Catholic Church issue! If you interfere, they’ll see it as meddling in our internal affairs! Don’t you know that?!”

“Yeah, well...Unfortunately, that doesn’t apply here.” Stiyl blew out some smoke, annoyed. “Take a look at Orsola Aquinas’s chest. See that Anglican cross hanging on her neck? Yeah—the very same cross our *amateur* accidentally gave her.” He grinned teasingly. “Placing that around someone’s neck places them under the protection of the Anglican Church—which means she has been baptized and is now one of us. Our archbishop prepared that cross personally. And she ordered me to hang it around Orsola’s neck myself...It was low on the priority list, so I had left it for later and given it to that man over there. I figured it would be a bit of insurance, to make you think the amateur was under Anglican Church’s umbrella should you have captured him...but somehow or another, it ended up on Orsola, just as planned. That means Orsola Aquinas is not a member of the Roman Catholic Church—but one of the Anglican Church.”

“I get it. So that’s why...” Kamijou absently thought back.

When he casually said he'd give her the cross, Orsola seemed extremely happy...

So this is what it *really* meant.

Agnese's face grew bright red. After moving her mouth up and down a few times, she said, "Y-you think such sophistry will work?"

"No, I don't. It's not as though it was performed according to Anglican ceremony, by an Anglican priest, in an Anglican church." Stiyl wiggled his cigarette. "But that doesn't mean Orsola *isn't* in a very delicate position right now, does it? A Roman Catholic disciple received an Anglican cross—plus, someone from Academy City, from the science side, gave it to her. I think we should take some time now to deliberate on what faction she is technically a part of right now. If you put her to trial as just a Roman Catholic, then the Anglican Church won't sit idly by."

Stiyl jumped from the window and quietly landed in front of the pulpit. He pointed the tip of his flame sword at the distant Agnese's face. "And above all—*you dared to point your blades at her*." Stiyl bared his teeth. "Did you think I was that naïve? That I was kind enough to let that slip?"

"Damn! Just because there's one more of you now doesn't mean—?!" she began to shout hatefully, but once again, someone *else's* voice interrupted.

"Man, hope you're not thinking you'll get away with just two!"

"?!"

As Agnese turned to face the audacious male voice, this time, the wall to her side blasted apart and crumbled. From the dense clouds of dust walked a tall man with a large sword.

"Tatemiya..." Kamijou voiced the name of the tall man holding the pure white flamberge of unknown composition.

Tatemiya Saiji.

The vicar—representative—pope of the diversified religious fusion of Christianity, the Amakusa-style Christian Church.

And behind him were gathered the members of the Amakusa, who should have been confined in a separate building. They numbered about fifty—it was probably everyone who had been locked up.

"No need to ask me why I'm fighting here, is there?"

Surprised, Kamijou said, "Y-you...But you said it would be best to hit them while they were on the move..."

“Because I thought you’d give up and go home if I said that. I talked it over with the Anglicans and we *tried* to set things up so that we’d finish things before you made a move. You’re an even bigger idiot than I thought. But you’re fun to watch, so I can’t really hate ya,” answered Tatemiya, amazed.

And last of all, footsteps rang out, and the familiar voice of a girl in white came to him from behind.

“That’s why I told you not to worry, Touma—someone else would settle things!”

“In...dex...”

A small, yet reassuring hand was placed on his astounded shoulder. “But we can’t help it now that it’s come to this, I guess!—Let’s save her, Touma. Let’s save Orsola Aquinas with our own hands!”

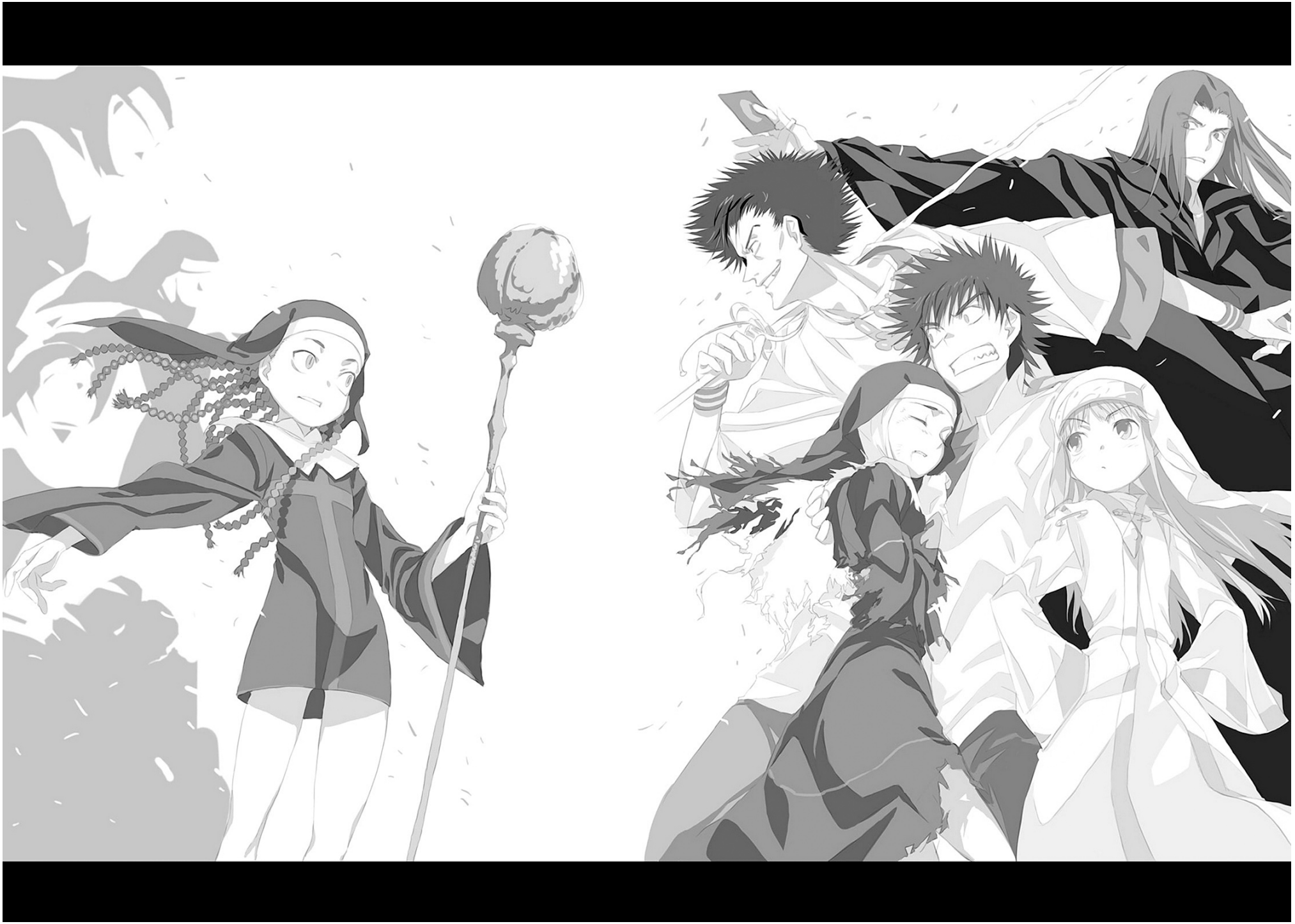
“Yeah.” nodded Kamijou.

Agnese Sanctis, watching the whole thing, exploded.

“Kill them!”

With a single order—the hundreds of sisters in the dark leaped at them to attack.

The final battle had begun—the final battle of those gathered to settle the score of this ridiculous story.



Between the Lines 2

In the middle of the night, Kanzaki Kaori stood on the roof of a building.

The landscape before her eyes portrayed the under-construction Church of Orsola. Its impression was far from that of a church—not a speck of silence, filled with the sounds of violence and breaking.

She was standing far away from the church, but her keen ears could hear what they said. They heard the words of those who stood up for a single girl.

Kanzaki never planned on taking the Amakusa's side or killing the Roman Catholic enemy from the beginning. She had not absconded right after the incident so that she could exercise violence.

She just wanted to make her true intentions known.

She wanted the Amakusa to know that even without her, they would still be the Amakusa, and nothing would change.

And they had just shown that, just as she'd believed they would. She narrowed her eyes in a gentle, natural smile, as though gazing at an object of nostalgia.

A place she could never go home to again.

But now she would be able to treasure that place in her heart, forever and ever.

From behind her, she heard unconcealed footsteps.

"Nyaha! I see you're feeling totally grateful and moved, there, Nee-chin. Ain't it a sight? Your old friends didn't kidnap Orsola so they could use the *Book of the Law* for their own greed after all!"

"Tsuchimikado..." Kanzaki hastily erased her expression and turned around—but she couldn't seem to accomplish that when she saw Tsuchimikado's broad grin.

She spoke in a strict tone to hide her abashment. "Are you finished on your end? You were talking about snatching up the *Book of the Law*'s original copy using this opportunity..."

"Hmm, who knows? Maybe I did, maybe I didn't."

"..."

"I'm kidding. Don't look at me like that! You basically know what's goin' on, right? The Amakusa Church didn't steal the book. It was all the Roman Catholic Church tryin' to

frame ‘em. That means they didn’t need to bring the thing into Japan in the first place, yeah? The one they brought here was a forgery. The real thing is deep, deep in the Vatican Library as we speak.”

Tsuchimikado was reporting on his failure, but his voice was awfully bright. Maybe he didn’t have much passion for his work—or perhaps he had lied, and he actually managed to steal the *Book of the Law*. Kanzaki didn’t quite know what to make of it.

He walked up next to her. He placed both hands on the metal railing to prevent falling, and as he quietly gazed at where Kanzaki was looking, asked, “So, you satisfied?”

“...Yes. More so than I thought.” Kanzaki looked at the church again. “They’ll be able to keep the Amakusa Church on the correct path without me. They’ve become very strong.”

“Mm, yes. They’re probably having a hard time, though—not gonna help ‘em?”

“I do not have the right to stand before them. And they no longer need my strength. I was as training wheels on a bicycle,” said Kanzaki, sounding a little lonely but proud.

She hadn’t hesitated even a moment to give her answer.

Tsuchimikado suppressed a grin at her seriousness.

“What is it, Tsuchimikado?”

“I mean, nothin’ much...It don’t matter, but ya probably didn’t expect Kami-yan to get involved in this, did ya? You still haven’t thanked him for the Angel Fall business and the Index struggle, either. Now you’ve gotten him mixed up in another one of your problems—you’re totally afraid of having to make it up to him, aren’t ya, nya?”

“N-not at all. Nothing you are imagining is going to happen!”

Kanzaki replied with a very serious look, but for some reason, Tsuchimikado burst out laughing. He laughed so hard and so loudly that it brought tears to his eyes and he started to worry it would reach the Church of Orsola below.

“By the way! What could those bandages in your hands be, hmm? You weren’t gonna sneak up on your unconscious friends and do secret first aid on ‘em, were ya? And then after you were done, stroke their heads softly with a hand, smile a little, and quietly retreat? Pfft, ku-ku! Man, Nee-chin, you’re so simple and cliché, you! I can’t believe you were thinking of something so embarrassing with a straight face!”

“.....?!”

“Hm? What’s up, Nee-chin? Your temples are all pulsing and...Hey, wait, wait stop stop stop! I’m unarmed! You can’t seriously use the Shichiten Shichitou on me! Does this mean you’re gonna bandage me up first, nyaaaa?!”

CHAPTER 4

Amakusa-Style Church of Distinct Doctrines.

AMAKUSA_Style_Remix_of_Church.

Part 1

The Church of Orsola consisted of seven sanctuaries.

Each of them was charged with one of the seven sacraments of Christianity. They weren't all the same size, instead varying in size and money spent depending on the frequency and importance of the sacrament. Orsola and the others were currently in the Church of Matrimony, which concerned wedding ceremonies. It was planned to receive the most in the way of finances, so the building was gigantic as well. Second largest was the Church of Final Anointment, which related to funeral proceedings; others with important religious significance, such as the Church of Holy Orders and the Church of Confirmation, followed, but nevertheless they couldn't expect much patronage from general visitors such as Kamijou, and so were the smallest ones. These small buildings were artfully adorned with statues, paintings, and stained-glass windows—it looked like they were aiming for additional income as a halfway art exhibit or museum.

That was as much info as the mobile version of its homepage on his phone could tell him. It was rather strange to see a website built by those on the occult side for their own choice, but maybe they wanted it to function as a sightseeing guide as well—the maps of its planned completion and even of the inside being made public could have been a money grab...though of course, it was only the places they *could* show to visitors.

"Damn!!"

Kamijou swept up Orsola into his arms and dove out the Church of Matrimony's back door. Not a hint of plant life greeted them as he stepped onto the perfectly flat stone ground. Armed sisters appeared from the doorway soon after.

He had waited for the very moment the dozens of Amakusa members clashed face-first with the Roman Catholic sisters to take Orsola and flee the Church of Matrimony. He didn't want to be separated from Index and the others if he could help it, but they were now divided by a human wave, so there was nothing he could do.

As he ran, he looked at Orsola's face and said, "Sorry I was late! Are you all right?!"

"...Yes. This much is really nothing at all."

Her clothing was cut up badly; the fasteners and other metal parts of it were broken, looking like something had crushed them in its teeth. She barely moved at all—just swayed a little—and held on to him tightly, which was all he needed to deduce how badly hurt she was.

But although her face held exhaustion, *pain* was nowhere to be found.

She looked as though she were about to burst into tears. With her hands up around his neck, she looked up at him like a child who had finally found her parents.

(Jeez, what the hell! It was so easy—I had a reason to fight right here.)

Kamijou held on to her as he continued his run.

However large the Church of Matrimony may have been, fighting against so many people inside it would have been suicidal. Strength wasn't the issue—it would be the human flood washing over him. And he was just a high school kid in the first place. He could win a one-on-one fight; one-on-two was dubious. Any more than that and he wouldn't think twice about running. That was the extent of his ability.

But.

But just because he wouldn't think twice about running didn't mean he had been defeated.

"Hm...!!" Before the countless hands of his pursuers could reach his back, Amakusa men and women, swords in hand, leaped down from the church's roof. Their blades blocked the Roman Catholic weaponry close to impaling his body, and the brutal follow-up kick sent the front line of black-garbed sisters flying.

With the sound of a wave retreating, a portion of the Roman Catholic sisters moved as a single creature and surrounded the Amakusa members.

(Thanks a bunch...!)

He ran farther, kicking an empty can left by a construction worker with his heel into the air. Of course, the effects of launching something like that were far from mowing down the sisters in black.

But when something flew through the corner of their eyes, they'd look that way whether they wanted to or not.

"?!"

As soon as they noticed the sisters' attention waver, the Amakusa members cut through the encirclement. They gave Kamijou a quick bow, then each of them began to flee as well.

He didn't have time to see that through to the end. The weapons wielded by the sisters may have been heavy, but they couldn't have been heavier than a human body. To close the slight distance that formed between them, the Roman Catholic killers ran after Kamijou again.

A sister closed in on him, swinging a lit torch. A softball-sized rock of ice came flying at him from behind her. He continued to dodge them, holding Orsola close. He soon spotted metal construction-pipe scaffolding surrounding the long and thin Church of Confirmation, which was behind the Church of Matrimony, and dashed up in bounds. He used the slanted rungs to run up to the second floor. The torch-holding sister carelessly came after him—he kicked her down to the ground with his right foot. A moment later, another sister somehow jumped from the ground up to where he was with a single leap; as she set foot on the unstable scaffolding, Kamijou swept her legs out and sent her tumbling back down.

"__"

The eyes of dozens of sisters on the ground stared up at him on the scaffolding, observing him mechanically.

They would have realized by now.

They could surround him with dozens of people and attack all at once—they wouldn't have anywhere to run then. But if he found a place where they needed to fight one-on-one, he could pick out an escape route.

The metal pipes making up the scaffolding he stood on were long, thin, and unstable, so the sisters couldn't deliver a unified attack from all directions. If they were to follow him up the narrow scaffolding, they would inevitably need to get in a neat single-file line. In fact, if that many people all ran onto the scaffolding, it would buckle under their weight and collapse. Unless they were prepared to die, they couldn't use their numbers to their advantage because of the sacrifice it might require.

The sisters in jet-black pondered on what that meant...

And then without exchanging a single word, their opinions aligned, and they all readied their weapons, still on the ground.

From staffs, axes, crosses, and Bibles to a giant clock hand you might use on a clock tower—the tips of all these myriad weapons pointed straight over their heads to where Kamijou was. Their blades shone in all the colors of the rainbow—red, blue, yellow, green, purple, brown, white, gold.

(Agh...shit...?!)

Kamijou hoisted the unconscious Orsola's body again in his arms, then began a mad dash farther up the metal pipe scaffolding. As he did so, feathers of brilliantly colored light flew at him one after the other. The shining weapons were like feather pens with arrowheads on their tips. In the blink of an eye they were speeding toward where Kamijou was sprinting with Orsola, trying to shoot right through them. The storm of feathers of light destroyed the outer wall of the church and the scaffolding alike without mercy. As soon as he heard the huge clanking sound and the scaffolding swung, he realized they hadn't been shooting at him—they'd been going after the base of the scaffolding.

They certainly didn't seem to care about Orsola's safety. They just knew they needed to keep her alive—as long as her brain and heart were working, they probably didn't care what state she was in.

The entire scaffolding they were running on tilted over like a sinking ship.

Of course, jumping to the ground would land him right in the middle of the dozens of sisters.

"Ugh, aaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh?!"

He gave a meaningless shout. Because the scaffolding was tipping over, his path was getting steeper and steeper. It was getting closer to vertical with each passing moment. Kamijou ran through it. The two-story scaffolding, at some point, had reached up to the roof of the three-story church.

He tightened his arms around Orsola and jumped with all his might.

Just when his feet landed on the marble church roof, the coffin of metal pipes and parts clattered to the ground in a heap.

His spine chilled at the sight of the scaffolding he was just on having collapsed, then finally stopped in place, still holding Orsola, and took a deep breath.

"A-are you all right?" she asked anxiously up at him, perhaps feeling like a heavy burden to him.

"Yeah, no problem," he replied, waving it off, looking at how Orsola was doing again. Her habit was torn all over thanks to the countless violent acts, her clothing fasteners were broken, and her skirt fabric was in shambles. Under normal circumstances the sight might have been rather arousing, but her thighs were black and blue with bruises like a rotten fruit, the discoloration of internal bleeding pushing any trace of that thought out of his mind.

(...Damn it.)

He gritted his teeth, not saying anything aloud but yelling inwardly.

(Not even a grown man could have stood up against your numbers, and you all ganged up on Orsola and beat her up like this? Agnese Sanctis!!)

He really wanted to charge into the enemy line right this instant, but Orsola worried him more. He needed to do some quick first aid and let her rest somewhere.

But there wasn't any calming down in this place.

They moved away from the edge of the roof toward the middle to avoid as many projectiles as they could, coming to a spot where the building walls would block seeing him from any angle below.

"Which means..."

He let Orsola down out of his arms onto the under-construction roof, and then grabbed a nearby box of construction tools with his hands...

The next moment, with a tremendous noise, three sisters came jumping up from the ground.

Kamijou swung the box of construction tools, heavy enough to make him feel like the one being swung around. It struck one of the three sisters, who lost her balance and fell to the ground.

The other two landed on the roof without a sound, one readying her giant hour hand and one her giant minute hand. Each had bandages around the base, maybe to let them grip it.

He heard the rest of them, who didn't have such jumping abilities, running up the stairs inside the building to get to the roof, right below him.

He felt like he was at a disadvantage, so he looked around with his eyes only, without moving his neck, for an escape route...and then he saw the girl wearing a white habit, running through the middle of the vast church site that could be viewed in its entirety from the rooftops.

Behind her were likewise dozens of sisters clad in jet-black.

But his bird's-eye view told him how hopeless her situation was. There was another group of sisters closing in farther along her escape path. She must not have realized there were enemies in that direction as well. If she kept going, she would have to run straight into them.

“Index!!” he shouted unthinkingly—and at that, the two sisters jumped at him from the left and right, giant clock hands at the ready.

His voice didn’t reach the girl running along the ground.

Part 2

Between the Church of Matrimony and the Church of Baptism, Tatemiya Saiji brandished his sword. Because the Church of Baptism was positioned diagonally from the Church of Matrimony, it created a triangular courtyard.

Until he was the last one there, he brandished his sword. After the members of the Amakusa Church had bought time at first to let Orsola escape, now Tatemiya was buying time for the rest of the Amakusa to escape the Church of Matrimony. Dozens of his peers were currently scattered around, fighting.

Here and there on the polished stone courtyard without a hint of greenery, there were pedestal-looking things for sculptures to go on top. Once the church was finished, there would probably be an orderly line of angels, famous religious figures, and saints, but right now they just radiated emptiness. It felt like ruins after heretics had attacked and destroyed every piece of religious art here.

Tatemiya Saiji didn’t fight while running, like Kamijou Touma did.

That was because he was skillfully throwing off the timing of the enemies’ attacks. He would never launch into a full assault, nor resign himself to complete defense—he maintained a position right in between.

As soon as the sisters came forward to attack, Tatemiya would take just one step forward.

The sisters would then back off and regroup, and in that moment, Tatemiya would take just one step back.

With their predictions gone wrong and the wind naturally taken out of the enemy group’s sails, their pace would be thrown off for just a moment. Tatemiya aimed for that moment and mercilessly brandished his sword. When the sisters would panic and move to defend, his heavy sword would knock an enemy—and her defense—way back.

Tatemiya wouldn’t follow up. After pulling out one attack, he would patiently move back. By neither attacking nor defending, but keeping a precarious balance between the two, he purposely erected an invisible wall—a state of deadlock—that shouldn’t have been there originally.

(Though I’m not gonna be able to rely on this tactic for very long...)

Tatemiya thought, leaping from rooftop to rooftop, catching his comrades brandishing their own swords out of the corner of his eye.

He pretended to give a smile of superiority, but on the inside he was nervous. Right now, all he was doing was taking advantage of the fact that the sisters were able to analyze the situation, and that they had some leeway to work with. If they decided to fight to the death, lost their minds' balance, and came at him in a full-blown assault, prepared for friendly fire and mutual kills, Tatemiya's plan would come crumbling down.

Whether it was attack or defense, the moment the balance tipped toward either of those sides would be the moment his psychological wall would collapse and he'd be swallowed up in the giant wave.

It was like fishing, he thought as he brandished his sword. If he recklessly cast his line into the water, the fish would just tear apart the string and run away. If he wanted to fish well, he needed to go along with the fish's movements to a certain extent, let them play with it, and make them think they had a chance of winning.

And then he heard the scampering of footsteps.

"More of them?!"

Tatemiya was startled, but the footsteps weren't coming after him.

The courtyard he was fighting in was between the Church of Matrimony and the diagonally positioned Church of Baptism, so it was a triangular space. And at the top of the triangle, in the slight gap between the two churches, there was the Anglican sister wearing the white habit.

She seemed to have managed to flee from the Roman Catholic sisters, but she must have run into a group coming from the other direction. Well over twice the number of enemies as Tatemiya was facing were surrounding her, blocking any movement.

"Shit. Don't go making me look bad, damn it!"

Tatemiya hurriedly tried to back her up, but the dozens of sisters surrounding her all moved like a single creature and formed a human wall. From their point of view, every time an enemy died, the people they split off to do so would move to reinforce the rest. They were fighting against a group of stragglers, which was why they probably wanted to finish this battle as quickly as possible.

Tatemiya glared at the sisters, and they glared back.

Behind them, Index was being swallowed by a wave of countless people, and she was getting harder and harder to see.

"Don't...underestimate—!!"

At the very moment Tatemiya caught his breath to resort to a bold move and swung his sword back into position...

He suddenly heard a man's voice coming to him from overhead.

"Stop! You can't get close to her right now!!"

Right when Tatemiya looked up, a second-story window of the Church of Baptism exploded outward with flames. A Roman Catholic sister came flying out of the broken window like a bullet. She barely managed to coil her feet to kill some of the impact from landing, but that was all she could do. She lost consciousness and rolled over onto the ground.

In the window, holding a sword of flame, was Stiyl Magnus.

He spoke.

"It depends on the situation, but right now she's strongest when she's alone. If we get close to her, it will sap her strength. You don't want to get caught in something like this, either, do you?"

"What?" said Tatemiya dubiously, when...

An explosion erupted from near Index.

Dozens, if not *hundreds* of people were completely surrounding her, leaving not a single gap—and then he saw Index. Meaning a portion of their siege had fallen. One of the corners of the thick C-shaped crowd of people was struck by an unseen power and completely blown away. It seemed to have landed a direct hit on about ten of the sisters, but one of them rolled all the way to Tatemiya's feet, dozens of meters away. At the sight of their ally flying over their heads like a rag doll, even the sisters facing Tatemiya turned around to Index.

Another invisible burst rang out, sending a handful of sisters flying.

"...What the hell is that?"

Tatemiya looked at the sister at his feet. Her face was a portrait of despair; her body curled up, stuck in the fetal position. And though she was unconscious, she trembled violently as if experiencing a night terror. Closer inspection revealed that her leg muscles had snapped apart. Her explosive flight had been performed by her own feet—as though some survival or defense instinct had gone berserk in an attempt to flee from Index's side even at the cost of ignoring her body's physical limits.

Stiyl jumped down from the second story and landed right next to Tatemiya.

“You are Christian as well, so you should understand. Christian ceremonies each have their own weaknesses—though perhaps I should call them contradictions. These weaknesses, or contradictions, are what caused so many Christian sects to be created—and all of them have formed even more weaknesses and contradictions. It’s basically what sets Christianity apart from the rest.”

“...What does that have to do with this?” Tatemiya waved the tip of his giant sword a bit, measuring his distance to the sisters.

“Floating in that area is the wisdom of all the world—all the knowledge of the 103,000 grimoires. She’s using it to denounce the contradictions in Christianity and its teachings. Sheol Fear. For those working under the Christian operating system, the contradictions in their faith are like security holes. Sheol Fear, which pierces precisely through them, is truly their bane. It causes the hearer’s personality to fall apart like a jigsaw puzzle.”

However, it would have no effect on those unrelated to Christianity, and grimoire authors like Aureolus would construct unique barriers so that the original copy wouldn’t corrupt their minds. Of course, there were *extremely* few people in the world who could write an original copy and not be physically destroyed by it.

“Grimoires don’t exist solely to be read. She can draw out the full power of grimoires even without magic using things like Spell Intercept or Sheol Fear. There is probably no better candidate to be a grimoire library than her.”

Before the dazed sisters could re-form their ranks, Stiyl and Tatemiya stormed in. Stiyl’s flame sword exploded, and the sisters pressed flat to the ground by the waves were skillfully knocked unconscious one by one by Tatemiya. Meanwhile, a little farther away, Index’s casual whisperings were blasting tons of the sisters surrounding her all over the place.

Tatemiya was half-impressed and half-amazed. “With a hidden ball trick like that, why didn’t she use it right from the start? And if she’d used it against us, she could’ve mowed us all down!”

“It’s a delicate attack, and there are frustrating limitations. Religious brainwashing is easier to pull off on a group all at once than on an individual basis. You understand that, right? Sheol Fear uses what they call group mentality in science to break through the barriers of their minds and use them as footholds.”

Stiyl caused his flame sword to burst, repelling the sisters edging toward him. One of them who tried to time her attack came away with a scalding burn on her cheek and quickly jumped away.

“The problem with activating Sheol Fear is that it requires a certain level of *purity* in their group mentality. It’s easy to cast on a homogenous group where everyone has the same thoughts, but it brings with it a difficulty to cast on muddled groups with different ideas. And during combat on an individual basis, it has no effect at all...In our battle

with you, Kamijou Touma and I were in the way, so the 'purity' of the group fell, thus she couldn't effectively use it against you. It has exceptions—and that's why I'm here as a bodyguard.

"In other words, if you jump in there now, the conditions required for Sheol Fear will be ruined," Stiyl said, disinterested, putting an abrupt stop to their pointless talk.

A new set of footsteps.

They turned their gazes skyward to see dozens of sisters standing on the roofs of each of the two buildings surrounding the courtyard.

Part 3

Inside the darkness-enclosed Church of Matrimony, Agnese stood with her back against a marble pillar.

Around ten sisters were waiting nearby as bodyguards, but every time they heard an explosion or a clash, they shivered and looked back and forth busily. Agnese simply stood with her arms folded and eyes resting—you wouldn't be able to tell who was guarding whom if you saw.

"Quit making so much noise already. You all look like idiots. Especially you, Sister Angeline."

"B-but Lady Agnese..."

Her clear sarcasm was met by an overreaction by one of the sisters. She looked as though she had seen the messiah as her ship was sinking. She probably wanted to ward off some of her tension by talking to someone.

"It's been more than ten minutes since the battle started. Even if you count Orsola, there's still such a difference in our numbers! This isn't normal. S-see?! That explosion—which side did that come from? Maybe they're on the offensive now...!!"

"..."

"W-we should go as well. We could use everyone we can—"

"There wouldn't be a point, so don't bother," said Agnese, sounding very bored.

"Th-then what should we do? They took Orsola away, so if they run away again—"

“They cannot run away,” interrupted Agnese. Then, as if so sure about it that she was too lazy to give an explanation, she said, “There’s no way they can escape. That’s just how this shitty world of ours is made.”

The balance crumbled suddenly.

Index brought it on. It happened while she was attacking with Sheol Fear, which she’d reassembled to only catch the Roman Catholic sisters, and wreaking havoc on the Christian believers’ minds by using the 103,000 grimoires. Suddenly, one of the sisters—if she recalled correctly, she was Sister Lucia, who had attacked Kamijou at the theme park with the wheel—shouted.

“Dia priorità di cima ad un attacco! Il nemico di Dio è ucciso comunque!! (Heavy attack! Light defense! Sacrifice yourselves! Destroy the enemy of God!!)”

The sisters all stopped abruptly.

Their expressions disappeared without a sound. They joined their breathing like a military force giving a salute and took something out of their clothing. In their right and left hands were expensive-looking ballpoint pens.

“...?”

At that point, Index anticipated some kind of magic attack focus fire on her.

But her prediction was completely wrong.

The next moment...

The sisters surrounding Index, nearly a hundred strong, smoothly took their ballpoint pens and shoved them through their own eardrums.

There was a sound like of fingers crushing grapes.

Crimson-red blood dripped from the holes in their ears.

They all tossed aside the two ballpoint pens they’d stabbed their ears with and took up their weapons once again.

Their faces were colored with intense pain, and yet their desire to destroy put magnificent smiles on their faces. On the sharp ends of the pens on the ground were stuck white stringlike things soaked in blood. They were human eardrums.

Index felt an overwhelming urge to vomit coming from deep within her.

“Are they...doing that to avoid Sheol Fear...?”

If they couldn't hear her voice, Sheol Fear wouldn't work. As Index realized this shocking fact, the sisters surrounding her all came for her at once.

"Damn it...?!"

Stiyl had been the first to realize it. He moved to go help Index in a hurry, for a moment throwing off the rhythm of his linked combat with Tatemiya that had been going well.

He burst one flame sword after another, toppling sisters with their impacts left and right and momentarily blinding them with their light. But reaching Index was as far as he could go—the sisters had gotten used to his series of identical attacks and had even found a counter for them.

"Over here!!"

Just then, the double doors of the nearby Church of Final Anointment flew open, and Kamijou Touma shouted from them. A wound-covered Orsola was behind him as well, and she was using a big clock hand wrapped in bandages as a cane. He must have run out of ways to fight on the run with the wounded girl and decided to hide out for a while.

Index, Stiyl, and Tatemiya all managed to dive into the church. Kamijou hurried and shut the doors, and not a moment too soon—one after another, blades came piercing through the black oak more than five centimeters thick.

They had successfully shut the Roman Catholic sisters out for the time being.

However, who knew how many minutes the doors would last? It was like the three little piggies nestled in their house of straw.

Kamijou sank weakly to the cold marble floor. "Looks like everyone's safe for now...Hey, can you walk, Orsola?"

"You are...quite a worrywart. I haven't sustained...such bad wounds."

Orsola's hands and feet were entirely covered by her habit, so it was difficult to tell by looking, but she appeared to have taken quite a bit of pain. Nevertheless, she gave a smile, though weak. Kamijou felt a pang in his chest, but there wasn't anything he could do about it. So instead, he tried to force a change in the topic.

"...So what do we do now?"

No one present answered his question. They'd been keeping up the precarious balance of the battle, but it had come toppling down all at once, and everyone here knew it.

The members of the Amakusa Church fighting outside were also barely maintaining equilibrium through individual surprise attacks and great escapes. They had their hands full with their own problems, so it would be hard to ask them for help.

With the gashing and thwacking of iron nails being hammered into a tree, holes opened one by one in the church's door. Index's face went a little pale. "I-I don't think my Sheol Fear can, umm, a-affect them with their ears like...th-that at all." She paled, remembering the sight of them piercing their eardrums. "And I can only use Spell Intercept against one person at a time. I don't think I can interrupt hundreds of people casting hundreds of spells all at once!"

"???"

Index gave an analysis of her own combat potential as though it were the normal thing to do, but Kamijou had no idea what was going on. What had Index done, anyway, and how had it worked?

This time, Tatemiya spoke. "My guys're doin' their best, but it's gonna be tough. The scariest thing is when people attack you prepared to die. If that flood of people hits us, it won't matter how much skill we've got, man. It's like an army of ants devouring a wild beast."

Along with his bitter words came the sounds of blades stabbing and thrusting into the doors. From the other side of the shredded door peeked in many sets of eyes.

Kamijou felt his gut freeze over.

If that door came down, the armed sisters would flood inside like an avalanche. They only had a few minutes' reprieve. If they couldn't find a way out of this, they were dog food—but the more they discussed it, the more it felt like they'd been cornered in a dead-end street. Kamijou felt a panic beginning to burn up in the back of his mind, but he couldn't do anything about it.

"Well, maybe if...Maybe if we had the *Book of the Law* here, we could use my decoding method and discover a way out...," said Orsola Aquinas suddenly.

Everyone present looked at her.

The Book of the Law.

The thing everyone had forgotten about—the one grimoire that triggered this whole incident. Said to have been written by Edward Alexander...the world's strongest magician, Crowley. Thought to be able to freely control angelic techniques. Rumored to declare the end of a Christian-dominated age upon opening it. The ultimate forbidden tome, sealing away utterly vast knowledge.

If the book was really that dangerous, they might be able to use it for negotiations just by declaring they'd undone the seal.

“But the book being stolen was just a farce made to trap us, man. I doubt the real thing was even ever brought to Japan in the first place. If they brought in a fake and the original is still in the Vatican Library, that’s it.”

““That’s it!!”“

Kamijou and Index spoke at the same time.

They had the original copy of the *Book of the Law* right here.

“Even Index couldn’t decipher the book, right? That means *she’s gone through it to try and decipher it*. So it wouldn’t be strange if you still had the whole book stored in your memories, right?”

“Yep. The encoded text has been collecting dust in the corner, though.”

This time, Stiyl’s facial expression worsened. “You can’t! If you do that, she’ll record the contents of the *Book of the Law*. If that happens, far more magicians would start going after her!”

“??? Are you worried about me?”

Index, “a complete stranger,” tilted her head in confusion, while Stiyl, “who knew her well once,” reddened as if he’d been caught unawares, then immediately erased it with a click of his tongue. Index *thought that magicians chasing her was a natural event*, and Stiyl was well aware nothing he could say would stop her—as well as the fact that he couldn’t think of anything better.

Stiyl made a sour face, then suddenly shouted, “Kamijou Touma!!”

“Wh-what?!”

“Grow stronger! If she dies because of what happens here, I will burn your body and soul to a crisp until not even ashes remain!!”

He swore under his breath and turned away. Index was still looking confused, looking like she couldn’t tell why he felt the need to get mad over this. Tatemiya looked at Kamijou and Stiyl in turn with a complicated expression. Kamijou wished he wouldn’t look at him like that.

Index, her head still crooked in bafflement, asked, “So what is the decoding method for the *Book of the Law* like?”

“Ah, yes. I’ll give you an explanation now.”

At her question, Orsola smoothly and steadfastly began their conversation again.

A bead of sweat broke out on Kamijou's forehead.

He had thought it a pipe dream this whole time, but now that it was becoming real right before his eyes, he sensed the risks he hadn't given much thought to come rushing to mind one after the other.

Kamijou alone (ironically enough) truly understood from personal experience how dangerous these angelic techniques, which were no more than rumors and speculations for magicians, could really be. The Sweep that one of the archangels, Power of God, had tried to unleash would have burned half the planet to a crisp with billions of bullets of light.

If they could use those here, it would completely change the situation.

But...

Was it really all right for *anyone* to possess such immense power?

Orsola read Kamijou's expression. "We are not saying we will use the *Book of the Law*'s power. We simply need to display our intent and ability to decipher and use it. I would much rather not use such a power," she explained seriously.

That's right—her reason for originally studying the book was about the seal on the knowledge within. Orsola wouldn't have wanted things to turn out this way, and even if they broke out of here for the moment, magicians around the world who desired the book's knowledge might begin going after her.

She had made this decision having considered all that.

She would take action she didn't wish to take. She had considered the dangers therein and yet still she said she would lend her power to Kamijou and the others.

The method to decipher the *Book of the Law*, a method no one in history had ever broken.

The very moment they unlocked the forbidden grimoire that not even Index, who contained 103,000 of them, could read...

"It's based on Temurah—in other words, a character replacement method. However, the rules are abnormal in that they are strongly related to the line number. First, you arrange the twenty-two characters used in Hebrew into two lines, then note the line number above each—"

Kamijou had absolutely no clue what she was talking about, but it all probably meant a lot to Index. Her face was more serious than he'd ever seen it.

Right now, the knots in the grimoire nobody could read were coming undone in Index's head one by one, being rebuilt as the blueprints for an ultimate weapon. As he thought about how mysterious it was, he got a chill—had they done something they would never be able to take back?

"—In other words, the character conversion pattern changes based on which line number of the character's page it's written on, so while it may look quite intricate, you understand the rules for sentences on the same line number don't change even depending on the page number, right? In addition—"

"You would take the phrases," interrupted Index suddenly, "converted by using the line number character conversion pattern, then match it up with the page number and change their orders. Then, finally, you'd come out with a single sentence. The title would be *The End of Two Ages*, and its contents outline physical angelic techniques in Enochian." It was as though Index had anticipated what she knew, and Orsola blinked her eyes in surprise. "That's enough, I understand it now."

Orsola, whose explanation was cut off in the middle—she should have been the only one who knew of this—paused in puzzlement. "Excuse me, but what is it that you understand?"

"Right," grunted Index. "This isn't the correct method. It's a dummy answer set up to trap people."

"Wha...," started Orsola, her entire body freezing for a moment.

Index, though, looked her in the face with a truly pained expression. "I'm sorry. I got this far, too. Actually, there are tons of other dummies, too. That's what's scary about the *Book of the Law*." She exhaled. "There are more than a hundred ways to decode it. And each of them gives you different sentences. They're all dummies. It isn't that nobody can read this grimoire—it's that everyone can actually read it, but everyone gets lured in to a false decoding method."

"B..."

Orsola squeaked.

"It's set up so that even incorrect decoding methods give you readable sentences. So even if you come up with an incorrect one, you'll think that it's the right one. It stinks, but maybe there was no way you could have realized it. There is a sentence in English written on the front cover of the book—do you remember it?" Index's face looked like she was struggling to convey the harsh truth. "*Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law*. In other words, the decoding 'laws' one thinks are correct will lead to an infinite number of *mistaken* correct answers. It's a terrifying grimoire."

All hope vanished from Orsola Aquinas's face.

It was only natural. She had risked her life to take on this challenge, believing that the knowledge she acquired would make everyone happy, and vowing that they would one day be able to destroy the original copies of grimoires—the root of all evil.

The decoding method, her greatest treasure, dear to her heart, could do nothing.

Not destroy the original grimoire and not rescue her allies from this terrible situation—nothing.

“Depending on how ya look at it, this may have saved us. Hey, think if we tell ‘em we don’t know how to decode the thing after all, they’d let us off the hook?”

As Tatemiya finished his question, there was an banging sound and the church doors shook.

“I...don’t think so. They can’t retreat now that we’ve seen so much of what’s happening behind the scenes,” answered Stiyl, giving a thin smile to the hopeless situation.

There was no longer anything to be done.

Their hope was lost to eternity, having never gotten it in the first place.

Kamijou felt an intense panic.

He went to guide Index and Orsola to the back door, but then he ran into Stiyl, his flame sword at the ready. His “certain kill” rune cards scattered helplessly all over the floor.

With a much louder impact, the doors of the Church of Final Anointment were destroyed and slammed down into the floor. As Kamijou and the others exchanged two or three words, into the church that carried out the ceremonies concerning funerals came hundreds of sisters all in jet-black, hoisting their religious weapons, flooding in like an avalanche.

Part 4

Ten more minutes had passed.

Only their leader, Agnese Sanctis, stood in the darkness-enclosed Church of Matrimony. The ten sisters assigned to her guard had looked about to be crushed by the tension, so she had relieved them of their duty and ordered them to join the fray. It would have been more dangerous to head out directly to the battle, but the girls all went to the battlefield with bright expressions. They would still have been bound by a considerable, unseen fear.

(There's no need for them to be in a hurry. Why are they so tense?)

Remembering the faces of her cowardly subordinates made her sigh. She could still hear explosions and clashing from outside the building, but her face harbored no unease. With experience, one could understand the situation by sound alone: the fact that unlike earlier, the enemy's unity was now in shambles and they were completely on the defensive.

(What's this?)

Suddenly, her ears caught an odd noise that didn't fit into the rhythm of the battle.

It was one set of footsteps, and their owner threw open the double doors of the church.

There stood Kamijou Touma, but Agnese Sanctis's face didn't show a hint of change. In fact, she almost seemed to be smiling. Unlike how he'd done the same thing before, his face was plastered with exhaustion and his body covered with wounds.

"No matter how I think about it, though, with that many people against you, you shouldn't have been able to move freely around here," remarked Agnese, resting her back casually against a marble pillar.

Kamijou smiled, his breath ragged. "Well...we made a little plan."

"A plan? Oh." She closed one eye. "I get it, I see! Is that so? After all that acting cool when you came in here last time, you ended up using your allies as decoys, didn't you? It's true—our forces are spread evenly to attack all of you, so nobody should have been able to get here, hmm?"

"..."

He remained silent at the meaningful end to her sentence.

Agnese smiled gleefully—she had hit the bull's-eye. "Ku-ku. Orsola Aquinas said something. That you act on faith rather than deceit, or something like that. A-ha-ha! What a laugh. In the end, you're only alive because you deceived your own allies and used them as decoys!"

"No." He answered her scornful voice with the direct opposite—a friendly smile. "I have faith in them—unlike you. There are things only they can do. I can't do them, so I got them to give me something else to do. That's all." He tightened his right fist. "Though I wish they could have a little more faith in me. I told them they didn't need to worry, and I could handle my own problems by myself."

"...So you told them you could stop the whole attack if you defeated me, their commander? Wow, I'm surprised you can still manage to remain so optimistic. Even though everyone thinks a flock of sheep without a shepherd will go batshit insane." She lifted her back from the cold marble pillar. She kicked her toes against her silver staff lying on the floor, then caught the flying weapon with one hand.

"Well, that's fine. I was just thinking I had some time to kill. Sloth is a sin, after all. I will destroy one of your illusions, one of your hopes—it will make a great diversion!"

Kamijou Touma checked around him.

There were about fifteen meters between him and Agnese. The building was under construction and thus empty, so there were no obstacles in the way. Despite all those people warring outside, only Kamijou and the girl were in this closed-off space.

She held a silver staff in her hand. The angel at the narrow staff's tip was designed like an angel curled up like Rodin's *The Thinker*, its six wings enclosing it like a cage.

Two hard clacking sounds came.

Agnese Sanctis took off the thick soles on both her shoes and jumped backward.

"Tutto il paragone. Il quinto dei cinque elementi. Ordina la canna che mostra pace ed ordine. (In accordance with all things. The fifth of the five elements. Open the crosier that symbolizes peace and order.)"

She held the staff with both hands, and after intoning words of prayer, the angel on the end of the staff spread its wings, opening up like a flower. The six wings stopped at equal points of a circle, like a clock face.

"Prima. Segua la legge di Dio ed una croce, Due cose diverse sono connesse. (First idol. In accordance to the laws of the Son of God and the cross, link a different object with a different person.)"

She lightly swung her staff as she spoke.

The staff's tip made a sound when it came into contact against the marble pillar beside her

(...?)

Kamijou frowned to himself at the strike that had been made outside her range, when—

A moment later, Kamijou's vision had toppled ninety degrees to the side.

“Gah...! Agh?!”

By the time he’d realized something heavy and metal had hit him in the side of the head, he was already crumpled on the floor. He desperately shook his unsteady head and made sure he had a clear view; then Agnese, with the bottom of her twirling staff, hit the marble floor with a thud.

Right as Kamijou, shuddering with fear, rolled along the floor, an impact struck it where his head had just been a moment ago. The dull noise created depressions and fissures in the floor like a hammer had slammed into it.

(A...coordinate attack? A skill that uses teleportation?)

He didn’t understand, but he figured he shouldn’t be standing around. Meanwhile, Agnese removed a knife from her clothing. Then, as though plucking a guitar string, she began to hack away at her staff.

Some odd noises came as Kamijou fled, something invisible slicing through the air behind him.

“That staff...?!”

“Ha-ha! I guess it *is* pretty obvious. It’s a little *too* similar for my liking to the map magic the Amakusa were gonna use. When I harm this, it harms something else in turn. And if I use it like *this*...!”

She pretended to draw the knife along it again, then flipped around the staff and struck the floor. A sudden impact came rushing at Kamijou from above, and with no way to fend it off, it landed unnaturally onto his left shoulder. A heavy blow rang out, echoing through the building.

“...!?”

He could probably nullify her attacks if he used the Imagine Breaker, but since he didn’t know where these attacks were even *coming* from, he couldn’t bring his right hand in line with them.

When he stopped, Agnese twirled the angel staff again and slammed it hard into the nearby marble pillar.

(Oh...shit...!)

He hastily jumped to the side. The only good thing about this was that her attacks lagged behind her command—albeit for less than a second—giving him some leeway. So he should have just needed to keep moving to dodge the attacks, but...

The attack shouldn’t have hit—but it sank into Kamijou’s left arm and side all at once.

“Guh...!!”

The sideways blow sent Kamijou sliding down across the floor. In his sides, right from the core of his body, burst forth a stinging pain. His left arm had been between the point of impact and his sides, and yet the strike had slammed into both. Caught in the middle, a joint in his left arm might have been dislocated, since he couldn’t seem to move it, and the sense of pain in it disappeared. It just felt a little sweaty and hot all over.

Agnese struck the tip of the staff against the floor.

Kamijou immediately rolled to the side, but the impact hit him straight in the chest anyway. He lurched, the oxygen in his lungs being forced out, and yet he still tried to scramble backward. Agnese took the chance to promptly slit her staff with the knife and deliver a diagonal cut to his back.

There was the sensation of strands of muscle being severed.

For some reason, there was a second before he felt the pain explode, like thunder after a lightning strike.

“Gah, bah...aaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh?!”

He writhed against the searing pain in his back—and Agnese swung her staff across. As it collided with the marble pillar, it sent his body flying across the floor like a rock skipping across the surface of water.

“You’re not gonna be able to keep making those dull dodges, you know.” Agnese twirled her staff, disappointed. “Maybe there’s a little gap between my command and its activation, but I just have to work that into where I attack to eliminate the possibility of error. If I consider how you’ll dodge and *set up* my mine attacks in the air where you’ll dodge, you’ll run straight into them! It’s no secret. Didn’t you realize my misses earlier were just my feeling you out?”

Kamijou moved his head, burning with pain, and managed to listen to what she said. He wobbled to his feet, paying attention to his stinging back.

Agnese already seemed sure she’d win. She rested her cheek on the staff she was so proud of. “Modern western magic uses weapons symbolizing the five elements: fire, wind, water, earth, and aether. Did you know that? Fire is symbolized by the staff, wind by the short sword, water by the goblet, and earth by the discus. They’re called *aspected weapons*.” She gave a smirk. “This Lotus Wand I’m holding is the symbolic weapon for aether. It has some interesting traits. It’s special because while it can manipulate aether, it can also be used as a weapon for any of the other four elements.”

She swung the staff diagonally down.

The moment it collided with the floor, Kamijou felt a chill and jumped directly backward. But even that had factored into her plans, as a strike from right over him impacted him in the head. His knees gave way under him. He had been shaken to his very core.

He could blindly swing his right hand around all he wanted—but every time, as if laughing at him, a hit would get him in the gut from a different direction. His vision slowly blinked on and off. His legs had already started to give way.

(Gh...gah...Damn it, I could erase it if I touched it. If I could only touch it. What do I do? How do I see where Agnese's attacks are coming from? How they're angled? I can get the timing at least, but...)

Kamijou's face becoming one of desperation, Agnese curled up her lips in enjoyment. "The five elements grant everything in creation its form. What do you think happens when you apply this concept to Idol Theory? That grimoire library said so before, didn't she? Inou Tadataka's map is the same. Though all that had was a connection between the *map* and the *terrain*. The Lotus Wand applies to everything. *I can apply those laws to anything.* I can use the space itself, for example!"

Agnese smacked the pillar with her staff like a stake. Kamijou was slow to react, and a dull impact got him in the gut, sending him rolling backward. He tried to sit back up and finally realized that blood was dripping from his mouth.

He spat it out. "Urgh...gah...Damn. For someone who hates...the *Book of the Law* and all this magic stuff...you sure do use it plenty..."

Despite the fact that if she kept prattling on, he could recover his stamina, she didn't seem to particularly mind. "Ah-ha-ha. Angry 'cause you got beaten? The crosier used by high-ranking clergy was developed from the mace, a weapon used to bash enemies' armor in. What's wrong with using a tool for its original purpose? Ha-ha. Still, a steel cudgel being the symbol of peace and order? Makes me laugh."

Agnese stuck out her tongue, her expression enraptured, and licked the side of the staff. The odd sensation spreading through his body made him hastily leap back. She giggled at his reaction.

"Besides," she continued casually, "modern western magic, whose fundamentals were developed in the twentieth century, has all sorts of underhanded Christian tricks built in, remember? As an alchemist might put it, I'm only using the unspoken depths of Christianity is all!"

She brought the staff down.

Kamijou immediately tried to dodge it, but his feet were lagging behind his conscious thought. There was a heavy impact that knocked him in the back of the head.

"Agh...! I don't really...care what you say...I'm not a magician."

“It’s the same thing! You don’t pray to God yet still receive His blessing. Such a thing mustn’t be allowed. Of course not! We act for our own benefit. Why should our taxes get spent on people like you who never work? The Anglican Church and the Amakusa Church are equally heretic scum. Any teachings other than those of the Roman Catholic Church are no teachings at all! Those things don’t even count as work. Anyway, you’re a huge pain. Now stop complaining and accept a death on the assembly line!”

(Here it comes...)

Kamijou gritted his teeth.

Agnese’s attacks weren’t as flashy as Stiyl’s flame swords or Tatemiya’s slashes, but nonetheless, he couldn’t keep getting hit by them over and over again. His feet were shaking, letting him know that his limit was near.

He knew the attacks’ timing.

If Agnese’s attacks were magical, then he could erase them with the touch of his right hand.

So now.

If he could just figure out the angle and direction they would come from.

If he could accurately align his right hand with her attacks.

(Here it comes!!)

Agnese’s face cleared and she swung the angel staff around like a conductor. Once again, his feet couldn’t avoid the attack she’d placed in anticipation, one step ahead. He was blown back without any time to bring his right hand up, and he rolled onto the floor but used the momentum to spring back to his feet.

He channeled strength into his feet and dashed forward with all his might so that he could gain even one step.

There were about seven meters between them.

Kamijou’s feet could carry him within range in two or three steps, but there was no panic on Agnese’s face. She must have judged that if he were coming straight at her, he would be easy to anticipate. She gripped her angelic staff tightly with both hands and slammed it into the floor as though she were splitting a watermelon.

There was the heavy sound of a collision.

If the impact came straight down, it would crack his skull to pieces without a doubt.

However.

(That attack...)

Kamijou skidded to a halt.

She had anticipated his movement, one step ahead of him—so if he didn't take another step forward, it wouldn't hit him.

(...It's the one I've been waiting for!!)

Then, he took his clenched right fist and thrust it straight into the space *one step ahead of him*.

There was a roar, like a balloon popping. There was a sensation, like an invisible, giant soap bubble breaking, and the attack that would have hit him was instead blown away without a trace.

"Huh?!"

Agnese, a professional, would have understood the strange thing that just happened better than Kamijou, an amateur.

He ran straight through the now-empty space like a bullet.

She hurried to swing her angel staff around.

But she couldn't get as much power as she wanted due to the unforeseen situation...

...Kamijou dove into range...

...Agnese's staff finally hit the marble pillar...

...Kamijou's head bounced to the side with a high-pitched noise...

...But still...

...*Nut still, he never once opened that fist of his.*

A sharp crashing sound echoed.

The back of Agnese Sanctis slammed into the marble pillar behind her.

Her consciousness wavered.

Her mind was blanking out, slowly calling forth pieces of memories that she thought she'd sealed away.

(Gh...ah...Am...Am I...?)

Agnese desperately tried to hold them back, but the urge to vomit billowed up from her stomach like magma gushing forth, preventing her from doing so.

(...Going...back?)

She remembered a back alley in Milan. All of the sun's light was stolen by the outward tourist city, and on the brick ground crawled people, mice, flies, and slugs, all together. A little gathering of the hopeless.

(Back...there again?)

Her memories burst. Their fragments tore at her heart. Behind a restaurant. Inside a garbage can. Wiping off the slugs crawling on the discarded meat. Brushing off the hairs of mouse corpses. Pulling off the detached wings of cockroaches. She chewed. She chewed. She chewed for all her days.

(No...no...)

Her whitening vision was recovered by her own words.

The weapon she'd been holding began to fall away from her exhausted, powerless fingertips. It was the knife she'd used to damage the angel staff. The symbol of her battle, the weapon to defeat enemies, fell from her hands and clattered to the floor.

However.

However, even without the knife, she would never, ever let go of this staff.

(No, no! Like hell...I'll never...go back...!!)

She filled her hands with power, squeezing the silver staff as if to break it.

Her consciousness returned.

She regained her will to fight.

""!!""

Kamijou Touma and Agnese Sanctis glared at each other.

There were about five meters between them. The distance could be spanned in the blink of an eye with either a close-range fist or a long-range staff. Their stare down was reminiscent of a sword showdown in a period film or a quick-draw contest in a western.

Sweat slowly dripped down both their cheeks...

Both their nerves and minds were stinging with heat...

Both their breathing had suddenly stopped...

“Hmph.”

Then, Agnese gave a dissatisfied snort and suddenly broke her fighting stance with her staff. Moreover, she looked away from Kamijou and around at their surroundings.

It was an opportunity, but Kamijou wouldn’t move so easily. He was searching for the danger that could be hidden within that opportunity. Agnese rolled her eyes back to him without moving her neck.

“I’m terribly sorry—you seem to be trying your hardest and all—but it looks like things are already over.”

For a moment, he didn’t understand what she said.

A few seconds later, he did.

There was no sound. The Church of Matrimony was now silent. Every single noise had stopped in its entirety. It was like he was standing alone in the middle of a closed movie theater by himself—the silence was deafening, piercing into his chest.

And it wasn’t only because he and Agnese had stopped moving.

Outside...

The Roman Catholic sisters, a whopping two hundred and fifty women strong—and the mixed force of the Anglican Church and the Amakusa Church, barely numbering more than fifty. There were supposed to be more than three hundred combined outside this Church of Matrimony, and yet the sounds and echoes surrounding them had altogether disappeared.

That fact meant that...

It meant...

“.....”

Stinging pains burst forth over Kamijou’s entire body.

As though to put an eternal end to that pain, Agnese Sanctis made another declaration. “It would seem that you all decided that they would hold out as decoys while you defeated me, the leader...,” she said—ridiculing him, berating him, and in the end a little sympathetic—”...but it looks like things have ended far more plainly than the illusion you were chasing after.”

Kamijou heard those words.

He listened to them, forgetting even to breathe.

The energy left his tightened fist. His reason for fighting vanished. He stood there dazed, as though wanting to say he no longer even had a reason to be standing here.

People’s faces edged their way across the back of his mind.

Then, as though crushing them with his teeth, he declared,

“Yeah...”

Then, at the end, *with absolute conviction*, he made a declaration.

“You’re right. Your illusion is destroyed, Agnese Sanctis.”

Her face creased into a confused frown.

Behind Kamijou, the double doors to the Church of Matrimony flew wide open.

Agnese Sanctis, looking directly at him, saw it from over his shoulder.

Timidly, fearfully, she saw what was there.

The silhouettes entering through the Church of Matrimony’s entrance—they were not the subordinates familiar to her but the Index and Stiyl Magnus from the Anglican Church, along with Tatemiya Saiji from the Amakusa Church cradling Orsola Aquinas in his arms, and behind him his colleagues.

And there was one more.

Standing beside Stiyl, a humanoid monster cloaked in orange flame.

Agnese did not know the identity of the monster.

If one who did saw it, they would have called it by this name:

Innocentius.

A behemoth of fires blazing more than three thousand degrees Celsius. It was the last thing one would ever see, housed in a cycle of explosion and rebirth. It melted and reduced to ash all attacks and obstacles to destroy its enemy. It was an attack spell of a battle-lover who held true to his belief that the best defense was a good offense.

However, even if one who knew of the technique had seen it, they still would have doubted their eyes.

It was no longer the ordinary Innocentius. Its flames were denser and its presence more intimidating. The waves of heat flooding from its body warped the air surrounding it, giving an illusion of countless transparent wings growing from the giant's back.

"Cards used—four thousand three hundred," said the red-haired priest lightly, as though singing. "Not so many, in terms of numbers...but still, the Amakusa aren't anything to shake a stick at. They made an even larger diagram using the rune cards' positions, used the diagram to transform the magical meaning of the entire area, then converted the whole Church of Orsola into one enormous magic circle. Though we did exclude this building from its effective scope so his right hand wouldn't interfere...A magic circle constructed with multiple layers, using every object here—I doubt I could learn such cheap tricks." Stiyl gazed in satisfaction at the flames roaring mightily upward. "I had everyone help me place the cards. Well, it was already nearly completed—just needed them to fit the last pieces into the jigsaw puzzle, as it were. Oh, come to think of it, I haven't introduced myself yet, have I? I'm not as good at making assaults on one place after another—I'm much better at creating a single point of control and defending it. Certain circumstances led me to desiring such magic."

She could see outside through the wide-open doors. Magical flames littered the flat, flora-less, stone courtyard, and sisters in black habits were lying there as if to cover it up.

Their bodies didn't appear to have been carbonized or badly burned.

The explosions they'd heard probably came from the flame monster. It had unleashed shock waves at the sisters and mowed them down dozens at a time.

Everyone who had fallen seemed only to be passed out.

There would have been barely one-fifth of all of the sisters who had been beaten into incapacitation. But perhaps that evidenced the destructive power of Innocentius—the sisters still holding their weapons had distanced themselves and were grinding their teeth. They must have seen that if they drew near without due caution, the explosive winds and flames would eat them alive.

"What did I tell you? We had a plan." Kamijou smiled savagely. "They weren't running all over the place to be decoys. They just needed to set up Stiyl's secret weapon and put cards all over the church, that's all...I don't know how any of it works, though, since I'm no magician myself."

With the Imagine Breaker in Kamijou's right hand, he couldn't help with the work of spreading the runic cards. That's why he shouldered the responsibility of going after Agnese alone. So that he wouldn't destroy the runes—their true goal—he made Agnese misunderstand that he had gone for her, prepared to die, and having used everyone as decoys.

Even without the detailed explanation, Agnese seemed to have guessed the particulars.

As well as what she needed to do now.

Without falter, still hoisting her staff, she shouted to the sisters outside.

"What are you all doing?! We still have a decisive numbers advantage! These pests are insignificant before a combined attack!!"

She was right.

No matter how they looked at it, the numbers difference between the Roman Catholic Church and Kamijou's group was absolute. The only reason they were still alive was their scrambling to use all sorts of clever schemes. If they created an encirclement so they couldn't escape then attacked all at once, they would easily win. However many dozens of sisters were slain in the process, more than a hundred more would march over their corpses and crush Kamijou and the others.

Stiyl, a professional magician, was *not* engaging in killing—but that, too, was only because if he was slaughtering them, it would cause the sisters to panic, thus creating the danger of all of them attacking, prepared for their own destruction...or that *should* have been why, anyway. Because with that kind of spell, it was more difficult *not* to kill the enemy.

And yet...

Despite the sisters having an overwhelming numerical advantage, they did not move.

"What are you...?!"

Agnese thought about yelling angrily at her subordinates for not understanding basic logic, but somewhere inside, she had realized it, too.

A doubt.

Though the sisters understood the logical thing to do, somewhere in their minds they couldn't have faith in it. Should they fight or should they flee—their minds looked fixedly at the swaying scales before them. If even one of them moved, their group psychology would cause an immediate change in the flow.

Agnese Sanctis recalled the words of Orsola.

—Those people…they act on faith.

—How ugly the Roman Catholic Church is compared to them.

"...That's...pretty funny."

She looked down, tightening her jaw so firmly her molars might break.

If the scales were settled in a precarious equilibrium, then she just needed to force them to tip. She would only crush the one before her, Kamijou, and show her superiority to them.

Even if she used the sisters to defeat Kamijou, it would not display an overwhelming dominance. But this was the same for Kamijou as well. If he clung to his friends to take down Agnese, he would be displaying his panic, his tension, his fear—and his inferiority. If he did that, the sisters' minds would be freed from restraint and they would be upon them like an avalanche.

In other words, it was one on one.

Kamijou Touma in one corner, and Agnese Sanctis in the other.

More than three hundred people in all surrounded them, but they were exceedingly alone.

Five meters were between them.

He was, of course, within the angelic staff's range. But it would easily be within his fist's territory with a tiny bit of effort. It was fifty-fifty—in other words, the one whose attack reached first would gain the honor of delivering the final blow.

(What...do I do...?)

She edged back and forth, gauging the distance, but on her brow was a bead of sweat.

Would her attack hit first?

She told herself not to panic, swallowing those words down. A simple clenched fist was no match for the convenience of her Lotus Wand. If she read his next attack and made one full swing, she'd demolish this *civilian* in one fell swoop.

(What do I do...What should...What...?)

But was it all right for her to leave everything up to the safe way—the full swing? What if he dodged it? And worst of all, what if she misread him and put it in the wrong place? No, she should use many smaller, faster attacks as insurance, then make her swing once

he had stopped. But what if those smaller attacks were insufficient to stop him—what if he just dove straight in anyway?

But, well, no—however, still...But nonetheless, that notwithstanding...

The negative sentences continued to pile up.

In the end, she couldn't decide on how best to play her many trump cards.

(The method...the timing, the weapon...the steps...what the hell do I choose?!)

And in contrast...

In contrast, Kamijou Touma would not falter in using his own trump card. He already had all his force in the fist at his right, entrusting to it his entire life and not an iota less.

He had faith.

Faith that however much he was hurt, however close to death he tread...

Faith in the weapon he had, faith that the way he used his weapon was correct, faith that he would doubtlessly see his weapon defeat the enemy, faith in that outlook, waiting for the beautiful, victorious future ahead.

Kamijou Touma had faith—and that's why he could act.

"It's over, Agnese," he said without falter. "You've figured it out yourself, haven't you? Your illusion of confidence—it was destroyed a long time ago."

Stiyl plucked the cigarette out of his mouth and flung it carelessly to the side.

The orange light arced through the air out of the corner of their eyes, and the moment it hit the ground, it marked the start of the battle.

The sound of fierce footsteps rang out.

Kamijou Touma tightened his fist like a wrecking ball and launched toward Agnese without waver.

(What...What should I...Ah, ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh?!)

Something in Agnese Sanctis's mind burst open then.

The moment of their clash was nigh before her eyes now, and yet the swaying scales never, ever, ever, ever delivered a conclusion. Agnese, pressed to make a choice but without having a satisfying answer, swung her staff with all her might, her face almost looking like she was about to cry.

One who bet everything on one last attack—and one who hesitated at that moment about what to bet.

The superior of the two did not need to be said.

The sound of a fierce impact rang out.

Agnese's body flew into the air, grazed the marble pillar behind her, and plunged to the floor.

The heavy impact tore the angelic staff from her hands. As her body bounced many meters away across the floor, the wind all came out of her and she finally stopped moving.

Then she lost consciousness.

With that, the balance between Index, Stiyl, and the others and the Roman Catholic sisters surrounding them had tipped all the way to one side. One of the sisters, convinced they couldn't win, dropped her weapon to her feet—and then the sound of another, and yet another came, until finally it was like a torrent of noise.

The battle was over.

The fist of a single boy had laid low an enemy numbering more than two hundred.

EPILOGUE

End Action.

The_Page_is_Shut.

Kamijou hadn't sustained as much damage as he'd thought.

His spotty memory started to force hazy blurbs together.

He knew he had collapsed in the Church of Matrimony, and that Index had shouted and run over to him; he remembered being in an ambulance; he remembered there being a bunch of time with special response or documentation or something; he remembered being diverted and brought into Academy City instead. He had promptly passed out when the frog-faced doctor looked at him, and he had awakened from his sleep on a soft, fluffy bed.

(Same hospital as usual, huh? Ugh, damn it, I can tell just by how the room smells...)

His eyes were closed and mind was foggy, but he suddenly realized someone was nearby. A quiet breathing and slight rubbing of clothing reached his ears. He felt a warm, soft hand lightly stroking his bangs.

"Tsuchimikado got a good laugh out of it..."

He heard someone's voice.

"...but I still think this is fine."

Her tone sounded a little reluctant, as though parting with him. The hand stroking his bangs stopped without a noise and retreated from his head. The warmth of her palm faded.

Kamijou managed to slowly open his profusely heavy eyelids.

"Hm...Kanzaki?"

"Oh, did I wake you? I was just about to get going."

Kanzaki pulled back just a little bit in surprise at hearing his voice. It seemed she'd been sitting in the pipe chair for visitors beside the bed until now, looking at him.

He sat up in the bed and shook his head to shake off his sleepiness.

It looked like it was dawn. The fluorescent lights in the dark hospital room were off, and the glow of the morning sky filtered in through his window like the sunlight through leaves. On the small table next to his bed was an expensive-looking box of candy and a note she must have planned on leaving for him. As Kamijou's eyes drifted around, Kanzaki slowly stood up from the chair. She must not have been planning to stay long.

"...Oh..."

Kamijou hazily started getting his mind's gears in motion. He looked at Kanzaki again—she was wearing her usual outfit, a short-sleeved T-shirt tied at her waist so you could see her navel and jeans with one leg cut off so you could see her thigh. Her shirt being tied like that accentuated her already large chest, and you could see dangerously far up her thigh, up to where it started—he thought it was sexy as usual, but he knew he'd be punched in the face if he said it out loud. He turned his attention to something else, eyeing the note on the side table.

"For now, you left a note...?"

As soon as he said it, Kanzaki's hand shot out at a terrible speed and snatched away the small scrap of paper. It was an impossible new record by sports engineering principles. Her face turned bright red and her eyes wandered to and fro, and she started to sweat as she crushed the note up with extreme speed.

"I-it was nothing much. Now that I have the chance to talk to you directly, leaving a note is unnecessary, right?"

"??? But—"

"It is fine already. It would have been embarrassing the moment I saw you read it."

Kanzaki went to throw the balled-up note into the trash can, but then changed her mind and stuffed it into her pocket instead.

(She must really not want anyone to read that.)

She put a hand to her abundant chest, took a deep breath, and her expression returned to normal.

"What of the condition of your body?"

“Well...There’s still some of the anesthetic left in my system, so I can’t really tell where it hurts.”

“I’m sorry. There are...less than scientific healing methods involving eating that the Amakusa have, but it seems they don’t work very well on you.”

“...What are you apologizing for? You can heal wounds by eating sushi and hamburgers and stuff? Wow, the Amakusa are awesome—it’s just like healing items in RPGs.”

“Huh...?” replied Kanzaki with an uncharacteristically vague and confused expression, not quite understanding his simile.

“By the way, where did Stiyl get to?”

“He has left the city already. He said something about not wanting to stay very long in a place he couldn’t buy cigarettes. He complained about the age verification here being too strict for him to get any, too.”

(It’s supposed to be like that everywhere.)

“Can’t he just get you to buy some for him?”

“I am only eighteen as well, so I cannot buy cigarettes.”

.....

“Why do you look like you don’t believe me? Why are you pretending to clean out your ears?”

“You’re lying! You can only fake your age so much with that body! You’ve got to be past marriageable age at this pooiiii-eeeeeeee?!”

Before he could finish, a light-speed punch from Kanzaki shot toward his face and stopped. He trembled—he couldn’t even prepare for that one.

In a calm voice, she said, “I’m eighteen.”

“Eighteen, yes! A high school girl, and yet adulthood is within reach! Kanzaki-senpai!!”

Kamijou desperately smiled, his teeth clattering loudly. Kanzaki gave a very tired sigh and pulled her fist back.

“...I feel like perhaps I should have let you have the note. Our conversation won’t get to the important part at this rate.”

“Important part?”

“Yes, a debriefing, or what have you...I came to notify you of what became of Orsola Aquinas, but should I not have bothered?”

“Tell me! Please!!” Kamijou replied instantly, leaning forward.

Kanzaki relaxed her shoulders a bit at how willing he was to discuss the topic. “It’s been decided that both Orsola Aquinas and the Amakusa’s main force have been incorporated into the Anglican Church. This is largely to prevent any revenge or assassination attempts by the Roman Catholic Church.”

Kamijou recalled Agnese and the sisters under her command. “So then Orsola will still be in danger?”

“No. Behind the scenes, they might make it look like they’re after her, but behind *that* it probably wouldn’t have much meaning to go after her. The Anglican Church has announced to the world of magic that Orsola’s decryption method was false. They believe Orsola won’t have to worry about being pursued for the *Book of the Law* now that people know it was a mistranslation.”

So if Orsola then really *had* broken the book’s code, everyone in the world would be after her now. Kamijou had a cold sweat.

(Definitely a lucky break.)

“Hm? Wait, the Amakusa’s gonna be under the Anglican Church’s umbrella now, right?”

“Yes. However well hidden their base is, there’s nothing in it for them to directly oppose the Roman Catholic Church. I swear—there’s evidence that deep down, they *wanted* this to happen. For example...do you remember the T-shirt Tatemiya Saiji was wearing? It was white, and there was a distorted red cross on it.”

“...Was there? I guess you’re right, come to think of it.”

“There was. The red cross is the symbol of Saint George—the symbol of the Anglican Church. He was probably fighting while dressed in it to show his intention to come to me, the Anglican Church, or something. I thought I’d given them strict orders not to follow me.”

“I see...,” said Kamijou, impressed. “You’re part of Anglican Church, too.”

Kanzaki said, “I swear,” again under her breath. He wondered if she realized her face looked like a mother looking at a child who couldn’t be without his parents.

“But are you, like, personally okay with that? The Amakusa Church is pretty small, but they’re an independent group, right? It seems like they’re being merged into a big corporation.”

“They may be affiliated now, but it’s not as though we told them to abandon their Bible and teachings. It is more akin to a group of samurai being employed to a feudal lord. The framework of the Amakusa will still be around. And the Amakusa has always been a denomination that changes form to most suitably match the time period and hide from history. They don’t need to worry about remaining in their current form, so as long as they can live in peace, it doesn’t matter what happens.”

In spite of that, Kanzaki had, without any hesitation, let go of the tiny society she had reigned over as leader before, for the sake of those she had to protect. Getting a glimpse of that side of her made Kamijou think how cool grown-ups were. She seemed eighteen, but from his point of view, eighteen was enough to be an adult all your own.

As he turned that over in his mind, Kanzaki lowered her head, her posture formal.

It wasn’t a cute little bob of the head—she kept it down and said, “Umm, well, that is, I’m sorry for all this.”

“Huh? Uh, about what? Why are you bowing? What are you sorry for?”

Kamijou’s head wasn’t working quite right, since he’d just woken up—so the sight of a girl bowing to him like this was extremely scary. The feeling that he’d done something really bad overtook him.

Then Kanzaki spoke. “Well, I mean, that i-is,” she stammered, unusual for her, “I caused you a lot of trouble for, well, personal reasons, and...”

It seemed like she wasn’t used to saying these words at all. Kamijou, in his daze, plucked out of the situation only the core fact that she seemed to be troubled by something. “Wait, sorry, Kanzaki. Did I cause you some kind of trouble? I’ll apologize, so—”

“N-no, that’s not it. If you were to apologize now, that would put me in a truly awkward situation. Umm, it isn’t that—so getting back to the topic, what I mean is...”

Whatever it was, it must have been pretty hard for her to say. Kanzaki twirled a finger through her bangs, preventing her own words from coming out of her mouth.

Then, the moment she seemed to make up her mind and say something, the door to the hospital room flew open—despite it being daybreak—and without a knock.

It was a tall man with blue sunglasses and a Hawaiian shirt.

Tsuchimikado Motoharu was swinging around a plastic bag with something that must have been a get-well present. “Hmm, hmm, hmm!! Kami-yannn, I came to play! I couldn’t afford an entire melon, so you’ll have to make do with a premium pudding dessert from the convenience store with melon slices on top.”

Kamijou looked over, away from Kanzaki and toward Tsuchimikado. “Yo. Isn’t school starting in a couple hours? Shouldn’t you be sleeping—Oh, sorry, Kanzaki. What were you trying to say?”

She flinched at that. Then, giving a sidelong glance to Tsuchimikado, she emitted an aura implying she didn’t want to have to say it in front of him—why must he have come at this exact time?

“Ohhh. What’s wrong, Nee-chin? Did I come right when you were finally gonna beg forgiveness from Kami-yan? I bet you’re gonna say somethin’ real clichéd, like, ‘I’ll repay you for all the trouble I’ve caused’ or ‘I’ll do anything you want’, yeah? Pfft—dah-ha-ha-ha!! Hey—it’s the crane paying her debts with erotica!”

“Th-that’s not it! Who would spout such nonsense to this ignorant child?!”

“...This...ignorant...child...”

Kamijou hung his head, almost hearing a gong ringing in the background, and Kanzaki twitched.

“Uh, no, that isn’t what I wanted to...I only said that to make Tsuchimikado take back his rude words, but the part about repaying my debts was, well...”

“But Nee-chin, you’re gonna end up stripping, right?”

“I-I will not strip! And what do you mean *end up*?!”

“Oh? Then you’re going for the whole wearing-whatever-clothes-he-wants-as-an-apology thing? You sure do know how to treat your patrons right.”

“Would you be quiet for a moment?! You’re making this more and more and more annoying with all your messed-up interpretations!!”

Kamijou absently watched them from afar as they reveled (from his point of view) in their yelling match, but suddenly the gears in his mind all clicked in a weird place.

...Wear whatever clothes...as apology...?

(N-no, I can’t—Kanzaki looks like she’s being pretty serious and stuff, so I can’t fool around like that now, come on, you know what’ll happen if you make her dress in a swimsuit like the dumb one Index was wearing at the beach this summer, it only takes five seconds to realize what a crazy delusion that is, go away, go away!!)

“...You look like you’re overheating over there.”

“No, it’s nothing, really! I mean really—if a man like me even brought something like that to the register, it would mean the end of my life as Kamijou Touma, so I wasn’t thinking about anything like that at all!!”

“???”

Kanzaki struggled to understand the ambiguity and tilted her head.

Tsuchimikado, however, grinned. “Heh-heh-heh. Now, what is thy desire?! A full-on ear-cleaning from an older, motherly lady while resting your head on her lap?! Or a surprisingly cute little bento from an older sister–like figure?!”

“Stooop! Our dumb conversations are one thing, but don’t go exposing all my weak spots in front of a girl like this!!”

“Tsuchimikado. I do not understand the situation, but it appears that you are only stimulating an injured person in a negative way, so I’ll have to ask you to leave the room.”

“A-and what are you gonna do when it’s just the two of you? Wait, could it be?!” Tsuchimikado’s eyes flashed. “Is this the scene where you gently feed him little apple slices cut to look like rabbits?! I’m sorry, I had no idea!”

“No, it isn’t! Please don’t arbitrarily get on my nerves with your arbitrary interpretations!”

“Wait, what, then you’re gonna do it mouth-to-mouth? You know, when you do that in real life it’s kinda gross.”

“Please just shut up and get out of here!!”

After she shouted so loudly he couldn’t even imagine what Tatemiya Saiji’s face (or anyone like him) would look like, Tsuchimikado grinned and jumped out of the hospital room.

Suddenly the early morning silence covered the room again.

As Kamijou watched Kanzaki’s shoulders moving up and down in heavy, angry breathing, he trembled.

(Tsuchimikado, oh Tsuchimikado. I think you said all that stuff because you were trying to lighten the situation a little, but you left things a bit unfinished here!)

“E-excuse me, Kanzaki? A-are you quite all right?”

“...What is it? Why are you speaking so formally?”

“I-I’m sure you know this, but all that stuff about repaying your debts and borrowing and lending, that was all just Tsuchimikado’s dumb jokes, you know?”

Kamijou had braced himself to be yelled at the same way Tsuchimikado had been, but surprisingly, Kanzaki answered in a stammering voice. “B-but I...What else would you have me do...? You’re a civilian, someone I should have been protecting from the beginning—but I caused you to suffer all these wounds. Even I understand that this is far past the realm of just bowing and saying sorry. So...”

Her voice got weaker and weaker as her sentence got longer, as though her own words were sticking into her. Once again, she started playing with her bangs with a fingertip—maybe it was an unexpected nervous habit of hers. After that, she violently rubbed her temples like she was exhausted and breathed a heavy sigh. Kamijou thought her actions looked kind of like a writer crumpling up a failed work and throwing it in the garbage.

Personally, he would have preferred the post-incident stuff *not* to drag out very long, and for her to just say, “Nice job out there, see ya!” like Tsuchimikado might, then leave. But it didn’t look like Kanzaki’s morals would allow her to do that.

There was no choice. Kamijou sighed.

He switched mental gears over to something a little more serious.

“Wait, so, was this the important part?”

“Yes. I have this predisposition to cause trouble for others, but I’ve been causing you one issue after another after another, putting so much weight on your shoulders. Every time I’ve shrunk away from it. And this time, it wasn’t just me—I got you mixed up in our problems in the Amakusa as a whole...”

“Hmm. But is there really any need to worry about it? We settled our problems just fine—everyone’s safe. I don’t think any of us really got any more hurt than anyone else.”

Kanzaki looked surprised. She blinked a few times, then said, “Our...?”

“Huh? Yeah, mine and the Amakusa’s. Oh, uh, I guess Anglican Church’s, too. And Orsola and Index and Stiyl, and you, too. That’s what I meant by *our*.”

“...”

Kanzaki Kaori listened to those words, flustered.

It was like a difficult problem she could never have solved had been figured out right in front of her in the blink of an eye.

“What’re you so surprised about? I’m an amateur, so England and Rome might have problems and stuff but I honestly don’t see them as much different. What I want to say is that the opinion of this dumb, ignorant child is that groups of people don’t matter.”

In contrast, Kamijou continued to speak without thinking about it too hard—as if saying the problem was so easy it didn’t need much deep thought.

“It’s not like I’m taking sides with Index’s church or anything. It just so happens that Index is part of the Anglican Church, so I’m their ally for the moment.”

He heard the pitter-patter of footsteps from down the hall.

(That’s probably Index.)

Kamijou thought absently, continuing—as though confirming whose side he should have taken.

“If Agnese asked me for help sometime, I’d probably go help her. She just happened to be the bad guy this time, but there’s no rule saying she has to keep doing bad stuff,” he declared, smiling.

Kanzaki made another surprised face, then smiled, a little worried.

The reason he had for acting was so immensely simple that it almost sounded absurd.

But because of that, Kamijou Touma would never stray from his path.

Never.

♦

England didn’t have a rainy season or a dry season—instead, the weather changed from one thing to the other fairly easily all year round. In this city, it was common knowledge that the weather could shift in just four hours, so there were plenty of people walking around in broad daylight with fold-up umbrellas.

For these reasons, a sudden shower was currently hitting the city of London after being clear not too long ago. Nevertheless, the people of the city didn’t consider rain a reason to stay indoors. The road was already narrow, but it was packed to the brim with a rainbow of umbrellas.

As the rain, almost a faintly damp mist, came down, Stiyl Magnus and Lola Stuart walked along next to each other. His umbrella was black as a cockroach, while the one Lola held looked like a teacup, white with gold embroidery on it.

“If we’re just going back to Lambeth Palace, we should have just called a taxi.”

“Those who cannot take the rain cannot live in this conurbation,” said Lola, gleefully spinning her umbrella around. There was no doubt, however, that he was biased. Stiyl wasn’t currently enjoying this mist-like rain very much. He was getting wet despite having an umbrella, and it made his cigarette wet—it was nothing but bad things.

He glanced at the tip of the cigarette, which he was finding difficult to keep lit, and sighed.

At the moment, he was following Lola, who was on her way back to her residence, delivering his final report on a certain incident as they went. The great and powerful Anglican archbishop was the freewheeling sort who went to the cathedral when she liked and went home when she liked. She didn’t seem to like staying in one place very much, so it was quite often the case that reports and war councils would be held during these walks.

There was no helping that Stiyl thought it troublesome to set things up to prevent sudden attacks and monitoring. There was a little trick on their umbrellas even now, making the area around them function like a telephone booth. It caused the umbrellas’ fabric to shake and converted those vibrations into voices, while at the same time making it so that the voices didn’t leave the “frame” of the umbrellas.

“—That should give you a basic idea of the incident. They intend to settle by claiming this was an independent armed action conducted by Agnese Sanctis and two hundred fifty under her command. By making it something they did on their own, the Roman Catholic Church seems to want to defend themselves by saying they never wanted to assassinate Orsola.”

“If they cannot rein in their own subordinates, they cannot get away with nothing, however,” said Lola, giving a wry grin and fingering her hair. Her beautiful hair could be called majestic, and with the raindrops forming spider thread–like patterns, it evoked fascination.

Stiyl gave a quick glance at her face next to him and said, “...Did you need to go that far?”

“Mm-hee-hee. Does it concern you, Stiyl? That I have welcomed into the Anglican Church the esteemed Orsola Aquinas and the fellows in the Amakusa-style Christian Church?”

“We don’t need to protect her—now that they’re officially saying they had no intention of killing her, they can’t recklessly bring harm to her now. If a sudden, unnatural death were to befall her in this situation, I believe it would escalate into an international Church problem.”

“Then they needst only accomplish a natural death, I suppose.” Lola gave a barbaric smirk like a pirate.

The difference between her face and her expression gave Stiyl pause. “Come to think of it, you knew the Roman Catholic Church’s true intention all along, didn’t you? Why didn’t you just order me to save Orsola Aquinas from the Roman Catholic Church in the first place? What a pain.”

“Not *everything*. I hadn’t surmised so far as Orsola having mistaken the decoding method. But,” she continued, “for me, either way would have been fine.”

Stiyl looked at her.

She twirled her pure white umbrella. “Just hypothetically, Stiyl. If we had blundered in our deliverance of Orsola, would the situation have changed? If she had been returned to Rome, she would have been put to death. Whether we succeeded or failed, either way, the *Book of the Law* would not have been decoded.

“So it didn’t matter which came to pass,” she concluded.

Whether Orsola lived or died was a small problem and didn’t concern her.

Stiyl exhaled, unsatisfied, and said, “Then why did you give me a personal order to give Orsola a cross? You gave me more to carry out in an already urgent situation. You can say what you want, but you intended to save her right from the beginning, didn’t you?”

“Urk.”

“The complete lack of reinforcements bothers me, too. You probably had a big Necessarius force positioned on the shoreline of the Sea of Japan, which is why you couldn’t spare any personnel, right? You used the cross incident as an excuse and put them there to raid Agnese’s forces while they were taking Orsola to Rome. You really are embarrassing, you know that?”

“Mmgh! Th-that is most certainly not factual! I interceded in this altercation purely for the Anglican Church’s benefit!!”

Lola spouted denials, looking like steam was going to come from her ears, but Stiyl didn’t bother to argue. The fact that she was the only one who was angry must have really gotten to her, because her face rapidly reddened.

“So what are these benefits you’re referring to?”

“...You’re so quick to turn me aside. I mean Kanzaki Kaori,” she moaned in a huff. “This incident served as a good example. Kanzaki has immense power, and because of her upstanding sense of justice, she could always take independent action. Despite naught having occurred this time, she was actually still in a fairly dangerous position. We needs must obtain a new set of shackles if we are to stop that from happening again.”

The relaxation left Stiyl’s face.

Lola's expression, too, had suddenly become more mature. "We canst not stop her with force, yes? Well, we could if we put our minds to it, but we would definitively sustain much damage as well. You have perused the report telling what fate befell those Knight fools, yes?"

Stiyl recalled the details of the report from the separate force.

Twenty-one fully equipped knights had planned on their own to kill the members of the Amakusa Church, but somebody single-handedly drove them into submission.

"And that is why she needs shackles that don't involve force. She possesses an ample bond with the Amakusa. Therefore, we cannot use negative shackles like threatening her harm if she does not listen, but rather positive ones, like offering her protection from the Roman Catholic Church if she listens. If we emphasize such negativity involving the Amakusa, she may rebel against us, but if we offer something positive, she wouldn't do so. Right? What a delicious benefit that is."

Lola smiled happily—and it gave Stiyl a cold shudder.

Though she might have seemed thoughtless at first, she was still the leader of the Anglican Church, and the cruel administrator and constructor of the system of the Index Librorum Prohibitorum.

She created the rule that they needed to erase her memories every year.

She created a body that required maintenance from the Anglican Church.

She lied that it was beneficial to the Church to keep Index from turning traitor.

She lied that she would die if they didn't, thus keeping Stiyl and Kanzaki from rebelling as well.

No one was more used to tinkering with all of the scales deciding a person's sense of values—their emotions, their reason, their sense of profits and losses, their ethics—than she. It bolstered the caution Stiyl felt toward her once again, but he was well aware there was nothing he could do about it. If he were careless, Lola wouldn't flinch to give punishment—*not* to Stiyl, but to Index. That's the kind of person she was.

Stiyl's shoulder bumped into a passerby.

It was a student trying to worm his way in between the two of them.

By the time Stiyl's body recoiled, Lola was nowhere to be found.

The communication spell connecting their umbrellas was already cut off.

He hurriedly looked around—what had she just done? He just barely spotted the white, teacup-like umbrella with gold embroidery far away. And the wave of people eventually swallowed up that, too, and it disappeared completely.

"..."

Stiyl, caught completely unawares by the whole business, gulped.

He got another chill at the sight of the enigmatic leader of all variety of suspicious magicians, and thought.

She had helped the Amakusa to cleverly prevent Kanzaki Kaori from acting.

He understood that.

Then why, in the end, did she save Orsola Aquinas?

He didn't understand that.

The way Orsola came up with to decode the *Book of the Law* was just a mistake, so there was no need to go through with securing her anyway. And saving her didn't bind anyone to her like she was doing with Kanzaki. She may have been an accomplished missionary worker—great enough to have a church built in her name—but she didn't seem to have the sort of charismatic attitude that could bring together whole groups and organizations like Kanzaki did. If she had, they wouldn't have been able to easily plot to assassinate her out of fear of riots and secessions.

"...She's damn devious," said Stiyl spitefully.

If he were able to think of even *one* calculated reason she'd saved Orsola Aquinas, then he would have been able to assert positively that she was evil. But this was another thing about Lola that was difficult to deal with—there wasn't enough for him to go on to say whether she was a good person or a bad person. In fact, she practiced both good and evil equally—truly as though keeping them in perfect balance upon scales.

The scales, of course, wouldn't tip one way or the other. With such a precise equilibrium being maintained, one couldn't judge her to be good or evil—no matter how much weight rode on either tray.

Thus, Stiyl couldn't say one way or the other, so he ended up slinking along under the Anglican Church.

(Or maybe that was her plan.)

The runic magician speculated briefly before disappearing into the drizzle on the city streets.

AFTERWORD

To the readers who have been sticking it out since volume one: welcome back.

To the readers who can easily read seven books straight through: welcome.

I'm Kamachi Kazuma.

I've just been going along, taking it easy, but before I knew it I'd come to the seventh volume. Today, on September 8, I'm going at a slow, steady pace as always. The series has been bringing you fights on an individual level, but this time there was a teeny bit of organized combat involved.

The occult keyword this time around was *grimoire*. Well, actually, I sort of felt like I should have brought the topic up before now, seeing as how the heroine is a whole library of them. In any case, I had grimoires show up in all sorts of ways and places here.

Other than that, I tried to greatly emphasize the unique traits each organization has. Please, mull over each one and the crazy attacks they use and thoughts, circumstances, and ideals they bear. It would make me happy.

I'll like to thank these two people: Haimura-san, the illustrator, and Miki-san, the editor. You're always doing so much for me—I may not ever get anywhere, but please, I look forward to working with you in the future.

And to everyone who picked up this book to read—I may not ever, *ever* get anywhere, but please, I'd like it if you watched over me, humoring me, as I continue worming forward in my vain struggle.

Now then, I give thanks for all the good fortune I've had to publish seven volumes.

And I hope I'll be able to continue writing more without stopping.

And I lay my pen down for now.

Whenever the subject is magic, Mikoto and Komoe-sensei don't show up!

-Kamachi Kazuma